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# REASON AND REVELATION

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# REASON & REVELATION

*AN ESSAY IN CHRISTIAN APOLOGY*

BY

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'DIVINE IMMANENCE'

Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος . . . καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο

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## PREFACE

AS I have summarized this essay at its conclusion, I need not anticipate its purport in a preface, beyond saying that it is, in some degree, a supplement to my previous essays in the same direction ; intended chiefly to call attention to the presuppositions of Christian evidence—those preliminary considerations, partly philosophical and partly moral, on which so much of its solidity and strength depends—and further to the respective elements which the intellect, the emotions, and the will contribute towards the gradual development of these presuppositions. The essay is thus primarily concerned with some of the permanent principles of apology rather than with any particular controversies of the hour. But it will also have an indirect reference to those controversies, as tending to exhibit their due relation to the Christian position as a whole. Since it is inevitable that the intellectual difficulties which each successive generation of Christians is called to discuss, should seem relatively larger than they actually are ; and need, from time to time, therefore, to be replaced in their proper perspective.

For if we look back on the years that are past, we see that men have often thought the Christian Faith to be on its trial, when they, in fact, themselves were being tried by the Faith. It has remained, whether they in their brief life-time kept or lost it, to test their sons, as it had tested them. Celsus would have been unknown to us, but for Origen, and Julian, but for Cyril ; in each case it was the Christian who survived. And we may be sure that the same will be the case in the end with the various problems of the present day. Minds may doubt, and hearts may fail, when called to face new modes of thought, or points of view ; but the time must come when what is false in all these things will fade, and what is true will no more seem strange ; and we shall then see that the fears to which they once gave rise were but phases, that were soon to pass, in the age-long life of the great religion of the Incarnation.

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

### THE HISTORIC CLAIM OF CHRISTIANITY TO BE RATIONAL

	PAGE
Christianity has always claimed to be rational . . .	I
Illustrations of this from :—	
(1) The early Apologists . . . . .	2
(2) The Fathers . . . . .	3
(3) The Schoolmen . . . . .	5
Leibnitz gives an historical summary of the period of the Reformation to the same effect . . . . .	12
And further enforces it himself . . . . .	13
Illustrations from Boyle . . . . .	14
Illustrations from Locke . . . . .	16
The 'reasonableness of Christianity' has been espe- cially congenial to the English mind, from the time of Hooker onward . . . . .	18
Butler emphasizes this . . . . .	20
Hence modern criticism is the natural result of the same principles that Christians have always pro- fessed . . . . .	21

## CHAPTER II

### THE CRITICISM OF REASON BY KANT AND HIS SUCCESSORS

The philosophical character of earlier writers must be judged in relation to their own context, and not to that of the post-Kantian age . . . . .	23
---	----



	PAGE
Kant inaugurated a new epoch by his criticism of reason . . . . .	25
He emphasized the activity of the mind and its forms of thought, in all experience . . . . .	26
But made this a reason for limiting our knowledge to phenomena or appearances as distinct from things in themselves, among which are God and the soul . . . . .	27
Whose existence we nevertheless are compelled by our practical reason to postulate . . . . .	28
Hegel removed this limitation by denying Kant's distinction between appearance and reality, and maintaining that the object of rational knowledge is reality . . . . .	33
This was a recurrence, though a critical recurrence, to the central thought of the older idealism . . . . .	39
A further important influence on the philosophy of religion was exercised by Schleiermacher, who emphasized its emotional side . . . . .	40
While, finally, Lotze recognizes personality, with its capacity for realizing goodness, as the highest reality, in which man approaches nearest to God . . . . .	41

### CHAPTER III

#### THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE KNOWLEDGE

It came to be recognized with increasing clearness during the nineteenth century that the whole of our nature co-operates in the acquisition of knowledge . . . . .	44
This may be illustrated from the process of understanding a book . . . . .	45

## CONTENTS

ix.

	PAGE
Which varies with the degree of personal affinity between the reader and the writer . . . . .	49
This illustration may be applied to scientific know- ledge . . . . .	50
And to philosophy . . . . .	52
But to understand any part of a book perfectly, we must have its entire context: which is impos- sible in the case of our knowledge of the uni- verse . . . . .	55
Hence we may study things in as much of their context as possible, and thereby gain indefinite, but concrete, knowledge . . . . .	56
Or isolate them as completely as possible from their context, and thereby acquire definite, but ab- stract, knowledge . . . . .	57
Mathematics is an illustration of the latter process . . . .	58
Poetry, philosophy, and 'knowledge of the world' of the former . . . . .	60
Brief recapitulation . . . . .	61

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LIMITATIONS OF REASON

The distinction between abstract and concrete know- ledge illustrates both the capabilities and limita- tions of reason . . . . .	65
Reason is capable in proportion to its acquaintance with its subject-matter . . . . .	65
(1) But it is limited by our inevitable ignorance of context . . . . .	67
(2) And also by our personal prepossession- sions, which act most strongly in con- crete subject-matter . . . . .	70

	PAGE
(3) <i>And further by our inability to verify</i> our 'facts of experience' for ourselves.	72
Hence the mass of accumulated knowledge which is in daily currency is, to the individual who makes use of it, only hypothetical or probable, of which he can never be more than morally certain . . . . .	75
Man is, in fact, more essentially an agent than a thinker, and his reason is more adequate for practice than for theory; not on account of any intrinsic weakness in it, but on account of the numerous limitations by which its speculative use is beset . . . . .	79
Though speculative satisfaction must always remain the ideal, which makes the pursuit of knowledge possible . . . . .	80

## CHAPTER V

### THE INFLUENCE OF PRESUPPOSITIONS ON CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

The controversies of the nineteenth century have led us to distinguish between scientifically estab- lished facts, and the various theories which are often illegitimately read into them . . . . .	84
Theology accepts the former, but rejects the latter . . . . .	85
Similarly we have learned to distinguish between essential Christian truth and its speculative per- versions . . . . .	86
The Incarnation is the central doctrine of Chris- tianity, and the evidence for it is complex, cumulative, convergent . . . . .	88

## CONTENTS

xi

	PAGE
But an important factor in it is the Gospel history .	88
We cannot approach this history without presuppositions of one kind or another . . . .	89
(1) As Christians . . . . .	89
(2) As non-Christians . . . . .	93
And these presuppositions must affect the whole of our attitude towards the Gospels, especially the Fourth Gospel . . . . .	96
Hence the controversies that gather round the Gospels are controversies between rival presuppositions	98
And these presuppositions result from old theories, rather than new facts, and represent the same philosophical controversy in which Christianity has held its own from the beginning . . . .	99

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RELATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO PHILOSOPHY

For there is no essential novelty in philosophy since the outlines of all subsequent systems were sketched by the Greeks . . . . .	105
The term 'Logos' which summed up the whole teaching of Greek philosophy, and was further identified by Philo with the Jewish 'Wisdom,' was adopted by St. John . . . . .	107
To whom Christians attribute the Fourth Gospel .	108
St. John then implicitly sanctions the general result of Greek idealism, and, therefore, the process of reasoning which had attained it . . . . .	111
Not reducing Christianity to a philosophy, like the Gnostics . . . . .	112

	PAGE
But implying that it must necessarily have a philosophical, as well as a religious significance . . . . .	113
Hence the Incarnation became the centre of a Christian philosophy . . . . .	114
Which was differentiated from all other by the belief that the Logos had become Incarnate . . . . .	116
And Christian thinkers recognized in this fact an answer to the fundamental questions of philosophy which, while supplementing, yet confirmed the general truth of Greek idealism; and by implication the capacity of the human mind to attain truth, and therefore its ultimate kinship with the divine mind, rendering an Incarnation possible . . . . .	120

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PATRISTIC VIEW OF CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE

The Fathers, for all their interest in the philosophical significance of Christianity, never regard it as a mere philosophy, but always as an historic revelation . . . . .	121
The heresies were attempts to rationalize this revelation, and the patristic answer to them consisted in the reassertion of the historic fact . . . . .	122
And this was the meaning of dogma, epitomized history . . . . .	125
The Fathers were reluctant to dogmatize :—	
e. g. Origen . . . . .	126
Athanasius . . . . .	126
Augustine . . . . .	127
Hilary . . . . .	128

## CONTENTS

xiii

	PAGE
And limited their dogmatism to the central facts of Christianity . . . . .	131
On what evidence did they believe these facts? . . . . .	132
(1) Miracles . . . . .	133
e. g. (a) Origen, (b) Athanasius . . . . .	133
(c) Gregory of Nyssa . . . . .	134
(2) Prophecy . . . . .	135
(3) The self-evidence of the Incarnation from its sublimity and power . . . . .	137
But this argument from the intrinsic excellence of Christianity is an appeal to the natural reason of man; as being 'in the image of God,' or akin to the Divine . . . . .	137
And this is in harmony with all modern idealism from Kant to Lotze . . . . .	140

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MODERN VIEW OF CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE

On what grounds does a modern Christian believe in the Incarnation? . . . . .	143
The Fathers appealed to miracles, prophecy, and self-evidence, but behind these things there were the presuppositions of natural religion . . . . .	143
These presuppositions lie at the root of Christian belief . . . . .	143
(A fact which is often forgotten by the opponents of Christianity) . . . . .	144
For if God created man with the desire for communion with Himself, which he undoubtedly possessed, the argument from Theism to the antecedent probability of a revelation is immensely strong . . . . .	149

	PAGE
And when we confront this expectation with the Gospel history, it has the notes of such a revelation . . . . .	151
This presupposition, therefore, qualifies our approach to the direct evidence . . . . .	152
Which is the same for us as for the Fathers, though with a different incidence . . . . .	152
First, for us, is the Christian character as a fact of present experience (which cannot fairly be paralleled either by ancient or modern unbelievers) . . . . .	153
And the conquest of sin which this implies . . . . .	155
This, in turn, becomes a fresh presupposition with which we appeal to:—	
(1) Prophecy . . . . .	157
(2) And miracles . . . . .	160
The modern objections to which owe more to Spinoza than to Hume . . . . .	160
And Spinoza's system is untrue to facts . . . . .	160

## CHAPTER IX

### THE INFLUENCE OF CHARACTER ON THE FORMATION OF PRESUPPOSITIONS

The reasonableness of the Christian position depends upon the reasonableness of its presuppositions . . . . .	164
(1) Theism . . . . .	166
(2) The consequent expectation of a revelation . . . . .	167
(3) The appeal to spiritual insight . . . . .	169

## CONTENTS

xv

	PAGE
Spiritual insight influences our judgement of the dignity of man . . . . .	174
As a being who can realize moral ends . . . . .	176
And, therefore, worthy of the assistance of the In- carnation . . . . .	178
Man's desire for a revelation is a reason for expect- ing it . . . . .	178
Because it is the desire of a moral being for that which enables him to fulfil his function in a rationally ordered world . . . . .	179
And such an argument from the rationality of the world is akin to that on which all science depends . . . . .	179
And the same conclusion may be derived from our desire for communion with God ; which though not consciously recognized by all its possessors, is nevertheless a fundamental characteristic of personality . . . . .	180

## CHAPTER X

### CHRISTIANITY AN APPEAL TO OUR ENTIRE PERSONALITY

The object of the Christian revelation is essentially practical . . . . .	182
And its essence is:—	
(1) That God is Love ; which is possible, because there is a divine society . . . . .	183
(2) That out of this Love, God became Incarnate . . . . .	183
(3) That God Incarnate founded a human society, to manifest, on earth, the function of the divine . . . . .	183



	PAGE
Such a revelation can be apprehended by the intellect, but can only be appreciated by the heart . . .	185
As may be illustrated by human friendship . . .	186
We must have a desire for God's love . . .	187
Which will enable us to recognize the signs of it— . . .	187
(1) In the story of the Incarnation . . .	189
(2) And the Christian society . . .	189
And our affections will enlist our will, and so gain further assurance . . .	192
Nor does this emotional nature of the Christian appeal detract from its completeness . . .	192
Since love is, intensively, the most fundamental . . .	193
And, extensively, the most universal attribute of personality . . .	194
And this attribute demands an absolute, independent Object, wherein to rest . . .	198
Which, in a rational world, is an argument for the existence of such an Object . . .	198
Whose reality is further evidenced by its reflection in the Christian society . . .	200

## CHAPTER XI

### THE REASONABLENESS OF FAITH

Christianity deals with man in the concrete, as an active agent realizing himself in experience . . .	204
And in concrete matters, faith or trust is a necessity . . .	205
But this trust must be guided by experience . . .	205
Hence Christian faith is only a particular application of the universal law of human life . . .	206
Namely, trust, based on the particular conviction, God is Love . . .	207

## CONTENTS

xvii

	PAGE
And this conviction, though taught dogmatically, rests as much on evidence and argument as any other theory of the universe . . . . .	209
Moreover, a deeper analysis will show that this trust in God is really the presupposition of all other trust . . . . .	214
It is easy to see this in the case of our trust in the uniformity of nature . . . . .	214
But it applies equally to trust in our fellow man . . . . .	215
Thus, the Christian only lives by a more conscious recognition of the principle which is involved in the Trust on which all men rely . . . . .	219
While the moral value which Christians attach to faith arises from the fact that the conviction on which it rests, cannot be attained without the spiritual insight which springs from a spiritual life . . . . .	220

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The great difficulty to the belief that God is love arises from the existence of sin and suffering in the world . . . . .	221
And of these the real difficulty is not suffering, but sin . . . . .	222
Christianity gives no speculative answer to this diffi- culty . . . . .	223
But we cannot conceive finite free-will without the possibility of sin, or . . . . .	224
Any worth in human nature without free-will . . . . .	224

	PAGE
And there is no necessary incompatibility between the Christian doctrine of the fall, and the evolutionary position that moral evil is the practically inevitable consequence of man's ascent from the animal world . . . .	226
Nor must the Christian view of future punishment be said to complicate the original difficulty—	
For there are three views of this:—	
(1) Eternal punishment . . . . .	228
(2) Annihilation . . . . .	228
(3) Universal restitution . . . . .	228
1. All three of these views have been maintained within the Church . . . . .	229
2. All three can be supported by isolated passages of the New Testament . . . . .	229
There is, therefore, no one exclusively Christian doctrine on the subject . . . . .	230
While even everlasting punishment may be compatible with reconciliation to God . . . .	230
Moreover, the warnings of the New Testament are part of the same revelation that proclaims God to be Love, and must be ultimately, therefore, interpretable in that light . . . .	233
But Christianity does lay extreme stress on the practical aspect of sin; and that with a view to its removal . . . . .	236
And the practical success of Christianity in overcoming sin is among its strongest evidences .	239
For a coherent system which can be tested in a crucial point, and there found true, may be presumed to be true in all other respects . .	240

## CHAPTER XIII

	PAGE
CONCLUSION . . . . .	241

## NOTES

I. The mental initiative in knowledge . . . . .	240
II. The categorical imperative of the moral law . . . . .	251
III. The antecedent probability of a revelation . . . . .	252
IV. Cicero on moral evil . . . . .	256
V. The influence of presuppositions on our attitude towards miracles . . . . .	257
VI. Man's dignity as a spiritual being . . . . .	258
VII. Union of human with divine will . . . . .	261
VIII. Ethical teleology . . . . .	262
IX. God the only adequate Object of human love . . . . .	264
X. The influence of the will upon faith . . . . .	267
XI. Imperfection of our present comprehension of the universe . . . . .	269
XII. Christian evidence one whole . . . . .	271



# REASON AND REVELATION

## CHAPTER I

### THE HISTORIC CLAIM OF CHRISTIANITY TO BE RATIONAL

THE mental attitude implied in the paradox ‘*Credo quia absurdum*’ has often reappeared in Christian history. Nor is it one which has been, by any means, confined to unintellectual ages or men. Tertullian himself, the author of the famous phrase, was among the foremost thinkers of a thoughtful age; and we may hear it echoed in a philosophic century by no less a philosopher than Pascal: ‘*Se moquer de la philosophie, ce soit vraiment philosopher.*’ But such a tone of thought, however recurrent, has always been idiosyncratic; the peculiar product of an individual temperament or isolated sect. It in no way represents the dominant Christian tradition. For Christianity, from the day when St. Paul first encountered philosophers at Athens, has claimed to be a philosophical religion—a religion, that is to say, which, though avowedly based on revelation, appealed to

the intellect no less than to the heart; throwing a new and larger light upon the problems of philosophy, as well as on the perplexities of ordinary life; and ready to prove, at the bar of reason, its intrinsic superiority to all rival speculations on the mystery of things. 'Whom ye ignorantly'—or agnostically (*ἀγνοοῦντες*)—'worship,' says St. Paul, 'Him declare I unto you.' 'The Word' (*Λόγος*), adds St. John—choosing a term from the current philosophy of the day—'The Word was God' and 'was made flesh.' Christianity, for both, is the crown and climax of previous thoughts and aspirations; and may be rationally recognized as such.

The keynote thus struck in the New Testament continues to resound through Christian history. The earliest literature of the Church was, as is well known, mainly apologetic; defensive, that is, of Christianity against pagan criticism and opposition. And all the apologists appeal fearlessly to reason. They contrast the dignified simplicity of Christian theology with the ludicrous legends of the heathen gods; and the pure morality of its believers with the vices of contemporary society. They point to the mutual contradiction and inconsistent lives of the professed philosophers as proof of their inability to be guides of life. They emphasize the self-evident superiority of the Hebrew Scriptures to other literature; and, finally,

the congruity of Christianity with all that was confessedly noblest and best in secular thought. 'It is our boast<sup>1</sup>,' says one, 'to have attained what philosophers have hitherto so earnestly sought without success.' 'Our philosophy<sup>2</sup>,' says another, 'excels the Greek in speculative depth and intrinsic rationality, as well as in divine power over life.'

And when we pass from the earlier apologetic age to that of the greater Christian Fathers which succeeded it, the same high estimate of reason is everywhere apparent.

'In every man,' says St. Cyril of Alexandria<sup>3</sup>, 'whom He calls into existence . . . God implants the root of understanding, and thus makes him a rational creature, and partaker of His own nature'; and again<sup>4</sup>, 'The divine Word has made all nature intelligible, and implanted reason, like a seed, in every man that comes into the world.'

'To do everything by the Word,' says St. Ambrose<sup>5</sup>, 'and nothing without the Word, thou must do everything by reason and nothing without reason, for thou art a rational being, O man.'

'Rational souls,' adds St. Augustine<sup>6</sup> 'have no other true light than the Word of God Himself'; and again: 'It is He who continually nourishes every rational soul.'

<sup>1</sup> Min. Fel. *Act.* c. xxxviii.

<sup>2</sup> Clem. Alex. *Strom.* i. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Cyril of Alex. *In Ioan.* iv.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. v.

<sup>5</sup> In *Ps.* cxviii, serm. 14.

<sup>6</sup> *De Gen. ad litt.* l.v, 30.



Nor were these expressions mere empty compliments paid to human reason, while in practice it was bowed out of court. Clement of Alexandria and Origen, the first great teachers of theology, insisted on the importance of both science and philosophy as a basis and preparation for the full comprehension of Christian truth. Athanasius and his followers were suspected by the conservative ecclesiastics of their day, for the boldness with which they rationalized the doctrine of the Church; as being, in fact, what, at a later date, would have been called 'neologians.' While Augustine, had not his fame as a pure thinker been eclipsed by his theological importance, would have ranked in the history of philosophy among its foremost names. But it is needless to multiply instances. The whole of the patristic period was one of intellectual activity, in which the leading Christian thinkers were not only fearless in their use of reason, but profoundly convinced that their position was intrinsically rational; that they were intellectually masters of the situation. We, of course, with our later knowledge may criticize their results, and question the rationality of things which they considered rational; but this will not alter the fact of the tone and temper in which they worked; the buoyant confidence which they exhibited in the dignity and capacity of reason.

But night, the night of barbarism, fell on this

earlier Christian world, and for a time the light of reason was obscured. The barbarians who overspread the empire needed to be taught as children; and the consequent emphasis of authority in matters intellectual, as well as practical, was with all its drawbacks an inevitable necessity of the case; the only method by which, for a while, Christian teaching could be conveyed. It was a temporary necessity, but one which only too naturally led to that undue extension of authority over the region of belief which so complicated and hampered the free development of the mediæval world. All the more striking is the fact that the Schoolmen, the great Christian thinkers of the Middle Age, are quite as emphatic as the Fathers in their eulogy and use of reason.

‘Reason is an inner light, with which God speaks to us.’

‘The created intellect is an imparted likeness of God.’

‘The intellectual light which is within us is nothing else than an imparted likeness of the uncreated light wherein the reasons of things are contained.’

‘All intellectual knowledge comes from the divine intellect . . . and is caused by the Word who is the reason of the divine intellect.’

‘God acts continually within the soul, in the

sense that He creates and guides its natural light.'

'Obedience to reason is a preparation for obedience to God.'

Such was the accredited teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, the extreme champion of orthodox belief. It is hardly a step further to say with Cardinal Cusa:—

'To seek the reason of things is to seek God.'

Nor do the Schoolmen use reason less freely than they praise it. In saying this, one must remember that they accepted the authority both of the Scriptures and the Fathers, in a way which some modern thinkers would call unphilosophical. But they viewed this authority not as a bar to thought, but as supplying material for thought; an additional source of information to be dealt with by philosophy, as it deals with all other kinds of experience. Dogma was not a surd, an irrational quantity, an inorganic element which thought could not assimilate; but a condensed truth which it was the business of philosophy to realize, to rationalize, to justify. This is clearly put by Scotus Erigena, who was at once the earliest and the most speculative of all the Schoolmen:—

'I hold,' he says, 'that reasoning must have its source in the divine oracles<sup>1</sup>.'

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* ii. 15.

And again :—

‘There is no more suitable ally of right reason than the authority of the holy Fathers when it is unshaken and consistent with probability<sup>1</sup>.’

And yet :—

‘Authority proceeds from right reason and not right reason from authority. All authority which is not approved by right reason seems weak. Whereas right reason, when confirmed and established by its own intrinsic powers, has no need of any corroboration from authority<sup>2</sup>.’

‘To philosophize is nothing else than to unfold the principles of true religion, whence it follows that true philosophy is true religion, and, conversely, that true religion is true philosophy<sup>3</sup>.’

The issue of these principles in the case of Erigena was a freedom of speculation in theology which brought him into conflict with the orthodox opinion of his day. But the orthodox St. Anselm two centuries later only gives a different emphasis to what is substantially the same point of view.

‘Credo ut intelligam,’ he says, ‘I believe in order that I may understand.’

For :—

‘Though the right method is to believe the Christian mysteries before speculating upon them, yet it seems to me culpable negligence, when once

<sup>1</sup> *De Div. Nat.* ii. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 71.

<sup>3</sup> *De Praedest. Prooem.*

confirmed in the faith, not to try to understand what we believe<sup>1</sup>.

*This is identical with the principle of Erigena, who had said :—*

‘There is no other safe way for faithful souls than to believe what is truly preached of the first principle of all things, and then to understand what is truly believed<sup>2</sup>.’

The only difference is that in practice Scotus laid more stress on speculation, and Anselm on submission to authority. Yet within these prescribed limits no one rationalizes more than Anselm. He endeavours to demonstrate the existence of God, the nature of the relations in the Trinity, the reason of the Incarnation, and the immortality of the soul; and his thoughts have left their mark upon all subsequent theology.

Abelard, Anselm’s junior by some fifty years, came both morally and intellectually into conflict with the Church; and was vehemently attacked by St. Bernard, who belonged to the more emotional school of mystics, for his rationalism. Nevertheless, he was an important link in the scholastic tradition, and cannot be called other than a Christian thinker. In his book entitled *Yes and No (Sic et Non)*, he exhibited the inconsistencies of the Fathers, with a view to diminishing their authority as compared with that of Scripture; and his general attitude is

<sup>1</sup> *Cur Deus Homo*, c. ii.

<sup>2</sup> *De Div. Nat.* ii. 20.

expressed in his saying: 'Doubt leads to inquiry, and inquiry to truth.' But he gave a further *impetus to the philosophical treatment of theological questions, and prepared the way, by his influential teaching, for the greater Schoolmen who were to follow.*

Those greater Schoolmen may, for our present purpose, be grouped round St. Thomas Aquinas, the most famous of their number, 'the angel of the schools.' For Albert the Great was his chief teacher, Duns Scotus his chief critic, and these three names represent the climax of scholasticism, which was, roughly speaking, conterminous with the thirteenth century. They agree in giving clearer emphasis than their predecessors to the distinction between natural and revealed religion; and declare that reason can only demonstrate the former. The Trinity, the Incarnation, and other specifically Christian doctrines must, they maintain, be accepted as revealed facts that are beyond dispute; though, of course, they can only be so accepted by the insight of faith ('*interior instinctus Dei invitantis*'): while Duns Scotus goes even further, and includes God and immortality among the things which cannot be logically proved. This leads to the distinction, after Augustine, between what is contrary to reason, and what is above it ('*quae sunt fidei excedunt rationem humanam*'). The truths in question are not contrary to reason; there is

nothing irrational about them ; they are simply above or beyond the scope of reason, either to discover or to criticize : much as—to take a modern instance—the higher mathematics, while perfectly rational in themselves, are beyond the reach of ordinary minds. Meanwhile, the part of reason is to prove that such truths are probable, or at least not impossible, and to disprove the arguments of their opponents as either false or inconclusive (*'non necessarias'*). And this, of course, includes the intellectual justification of faith as being a perfectly reasonable, and in that sense rational, attitude for the mind to adopt towards supra-rational truth.

It is usual to say that the Schoolmen systematized what the Fathers had developed ; but this hardly gives an adequate view of their significance. The Fathers, it is true, are much freer and more independent in their thought ; while for the Schoolmen feudalism and monasticism had created the category of 'authority.' They defer almost as much to Plato and Aristotle as to Scripture and the Fathers. But within the limits thus created they move with an intense intellectuality which is all their own. As a body they are far more essentially philosophical than the Fathers. They sift, and refine, and criticize every form of speculation ; and even in the act of determining the necessary boundaries of thought show their belief in its veracity and value. 'Faith

is not incompatible with doubt,' says Duns Scotus, 'but only with the triumph of doubt<sup>1</sup>.' And the words describe the universal method of the Schoolmen. They face every intellectual problem, probe every difficulty, test every adverse theory with exhaustive thoroughness, but with a serene confidence in the ultimate superiority of the Christian position. To appreciate them fairly we must compare them, not with the larger knowledge of a later age, but with the actual opponents whom they had to encounter, the Materialists and Pantheists of their day. And from this point of view it may be safely affirmed that, throughout the whole scholastic period, Christianity fully held its own in the intellectual arena. It was represented by a body of men, that is to say, who, in the face of all rival systems, maintained and made good its claim to be a philosophical religion, one that involved a philosophy of its own, which could be adequately defended, at the bar of reason, against all contemporary forms of attack; while in their own judgement—the judgement of a series of profound and subtle thinkers—it surpassed, in rational probability, all other theories of the universe.

Thus the Schoolmen, like the Fathers, assign high rank to human reason, as due to a divine illumination of the soul; and hold that its noblest function, its highest occupation, is the philosophical discussion

<sup>1</sup> *In Sent.* iii. 22.



of theology ; to prove what may be proved of 'the preambles of the faith' ('*praeambula fidei*'), 'the first principles of natural religion ; and to explore, and illustrate, and justify the further truths of revelation, which are not within its competence to prove.

With the Reformation came a new era. Christendom lost its unity ; and Christian thinkers can no longer be classed collectively or regarded as a whole. Nor is it always easy even to draw the line between writers who are distinctively Christian, and entitled in consequence to be heard as such, and others who only sympathize with Christianity from an independent point of view, and who cannot therefore be quoted as exponents of its mind.

Still, on the point before us there is a substantial unanimity. Leibnitz opens his *Theodicy* with an historical survey of the various theories which had been held in this period on the relations of reason or philosophy and faith. He points out that the Roman Church in the last Lateran Council, under Leo X, had authoritatively asserted their agreement and condemned the opposite opinion, that there could be any necessary antagonism between the two ; while Luther and other reformers, who speak at times with disrespect of philosophy, were really only condemning what they considered its misuse, and meanwhile, in their own practice, appeal freely to the use of reason. And his general conclusion is that 'theologians of all schools (fanatics only

excepted) are agreed that no article of faith can involve a contradiction of the necessary laws of thought, or contravene the results of reasoning, which is mathematically exact.' He then proceeds to discuss the question himself, with especial reference to Bayle, who had recently emphasized the opposition between reason and faith, with a transparently sceptical irony which Leibnitz treats with undue respect. He reaffirms, in opposition to Bayle, the Augustinian and scholastic distinction between what is against reason, and what is above reason. '*Elle est assurément très bien fondée.*' 'For to be against reason means to contradict truths which are absolutely necessary and certain. But to be above reason means only to be contrary to our habitual experience, or to surpass our ordinary powers of comprehension.' On the development and application of this principle turns the whole of the 'Discourse on the Conformity of Faith with Reason,' the opening chapter of the *Theodicy*; which thus carries on the great Christian tradition; and is important not only as representing the personal view of a great thinker, but also for its wide influence upon subsequent thought.

Meanwhile in England two contemporaries of Leibnitz must be mentioned, whose apologetic writings are of exceptional interest, from the character and place in history of their respective authors, Boyle and Locke; both earnest Christians,

but neither of them professed theologians ; laymen, whose intellectual reputation rested, in the one case upon science, in the other upon philosophy.

Boyle, one of the founders of the Royal Society, *was a leader, and an earnest leader, of the new natural science of his day ; and is even afraid that some of his scientific friends may be displeased at his making a temporary excursion into theology.* He is a remarkable instance of a man in whom the Christian and the scientific enthusiasm were both equally developed, and he writes ‘on the reconcilableness of reason and religion’ with all the caution of scientific statement, but with the serenest confidence in his position.

‘We Christians,’ he says, ‘in assenting to doctrines upon the account of revelation, need not, nor do not, reject the authority of reason, but only appeal from reason to itself, i.e. from reason, as it is more slightly, to its dictates, as it is more fully, informed. Of which two sorts of dictates there is nothing more rational than to prefer the latter to the former. . . For, as we were observing, that is not to be looked on as the judgement of reason, that is pronounced, even by a rational man, according to a set of notions, though the inferences from these would be rational, in case there were nothing else fit to be taken into consideration by him, that judges ; but that is rather to be looked upon as

the judgement of reason, which takes in the most information procurable, that is pertinent to the things under consideration. And therefore men, though otherwise learned and witty, show themselves not equal estimators of the case of those that believe the articles we speak of, when they pronounce them to assent irrationally, because the things they assent to cannot be demonstrated or maintained by mere natural reason, and would probably be rejected by *Democritus*, *Epicurus*, *Aristotle*, or any other of the ancient philosophers, to whom they should be nakedly proposed, and whose judgement should be desired about them. For, although this allegation would signify much, if we pretended to prove what we believe only by arguments drawn from the nature of the thing assented to; yet it will not signify much in our case, wherein we pretend to prove what we believe, chiefly by divine testimony, and therefore ought not to be concluded guilty of an irrational assent, unless it can be shown, either that divine testimony is not duly challenged by us for the main of our religion; or that in the particular articles we father something on that testimony, which is not contained in it, or rightly deducible from it. And to put us upon the proving our particular articles of faith, sufficiently delivered in the Scriptures, and not knowable without revelation, by arguments merely natural, without taking notice of those we can bring

for the proof of that revelation, on whose account we embrace those articles, is to challenge a man to a duel, upon condition he shall make no use of his best weapons<sup>1</sup>.

*Locke, again—who, whatever criticism we may now pass on his philosophy, was a profoundly influential thinker—maintains a similar view of the relation between reason and revelation, in his treatise on the Reasonableness of Christianity.*

‘The first knowledge,’ he says, ‘of the truths they [the Christian philosophers] have added, is owing to Revelation: Though as soon as they are heard and considered, they are found to be agreeable to Reason; and such as can by no means be contradicted. Every one may observe a great many Truths, which he receives at first from others, and readily assents to, as consonant to Reason, which he would have found it hard, and perhaps beyond his Strength, to have discovered himself. Native and original Truth is not so easily wrought out of the Mine, as we, who have it delivered, ready dug and fashioned into our Hands, are apt to imagine.’

‘Reason and her Oracles . . . contain nothing but Truth: But yet some parts of that Truth lie too deep for our Natural Powers easily to reach, and make plain and visible to Mankind, without some

<sup>1</sup> Boyle, *Works*, iv. p. 181.

Light from above to direct them. When Truths are once known to us, though by Tradition, we are apt to be favourable to our own Parts; and ascribe to our own Understandings the Discovery of what, *in reality, we borrowed from others: Or, at least, finding we can prove, what at first we learnt from others, we are forward to conclude it an obvious Truth, which, if we had sought, we could not have missed.* Nothing seems hard to our Understandings, that is once known. . . . He that travels the Roads now, applauds his own Strength and Legs, that have carried him so far in such a scantling of time; and ascribes all to his own Vigor, little considering how much he owes to their pains, who cleared the Woods, drained the Bogs, built the Bridges, and made the Ways passable; without which he might have toiled much with little progress. A great many things which we have been bred up in the Belief of from our Cradles . . . we take for unquestionable obvious Truths, and easily demonstrable; without considering how long we might have been in doubt or ignorance of them, had Revelation been silent. And many are beholden to Revelation, who do not acknowledge it. 'Tis no diminishing to Revelation, that Reason gives its Suffrage too to the Truths Revelation has discovered. But 'tis our Mistake to think, that because Reason confirms them to us, we had the first certain Knowledge of them from

thence, and in that clear Evidence we now possess them<sup>1</sup>.

The title of this treatise, 'The Reasonableness of Christianity,' has been somewhat sarcastically said 'to have been the solitary thesis of Christian theology in England, for the great part of a century.' It was an unenthusiastic, unemotional age, and religion was attacked and defended, alike, on intellectual grounds. But the undue, because isolated, emphasis, which reason thus received, must not blind us to its permanent presence at the root of English Christianity. For the appeal to reason which the principles of the Reformation involved was eminently congenial to the English mind; which, though neither naturally so philosophical as the German, nor so logical as the French, includes a great deal both of logic and philosophy in its favourite 'common sense.' Thus Hooker, the judicious Hooker, the father of English theology, had been quite as emphatic, a century earlier, upon the importance of reason, as Locke: the only difference being that in Locke's day reason was in possession of the field, and revelation had, in consequence, to be defended as rational; whereas in the former age revelation was the accepted fact, and the point which had to be maintained by Hooker, therefore, was the need of reason for its interpretation.

<sup>1</sup> Locke, *Works*, ii. pp. 532, 534.

‘A number there are,’ he says, ‘who think they cannot admire as they ought the power and authority of the word of God, if in things divine they should attribute any force to man’s reason. For which cause they never use reason so willingly as to disgrace reason . . . as if the way to be ripe in faith were to be raw in wit and judgement: as if Reason were an enemy unto Religion, childish Simplicity the mother of ghostly and Divine Wisdom.’

‘Whatsoever our hearts be to God and to His truth, believe we or be we as yet faithless, for our conversion or confirmation the force of natural reason is great.’

‘Theology, what is it but the science of things divine? What science can be attained unto without the help of natural discourse and reason? . . . In vain it were to speak any thing of God, but that by reason men are able somewhat to judge of that they hear, and by discourse to discern how consonant it is to truth. Scripture, indeed, teacheth things above nature, things which our reason by itself could not reach unto. Yet those things also we believe, knowing by reason that the Scripture is the word of God.’

‘The ancient Fathers being often constrained to show, what warrant they had so much to rely upon the Scriptures, endeavoured still to maintain the authority of the books of God by arguments such as unbelievers themselves must needs think reason-



able, if they judged thereof as they should . . . proofs so that no man living shall be able to deny it, without denying some apparent principle such as all men acknowledge to be true.'

'May we cause our faith without reason to appear reasonable in the eyes of men<sup>1</sup>?'

Endless passages to a similar effect might be selected from philosophers like Cudworth, Clarke, Price, and the Cambridge Platonists, as well as from the theologians and preachers both of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But we will conclude with one from Butler, not only for the weight of his great name, but also for its clear assertion of the critical authority of reason, the point on which much subsequent controversy was to turn.

'I express myself,' he says, 'with caution, lest I should be mistaken to vilify reason; which is indeed the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even revelation itself: or be misunderstood to assert, that a supposed revelation cannot be proved false, from internal characters. For, it may contain clear immoralities or contradictions; and either of these would prove it false. Nor will I take upon me to affirm, that nothing else can possibly render any supposed revelation incredible<sup>2</sup>.'

<sup>1</sup> Hooker, *Ecccl. Pol.* iii. c. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Butler, *Anal.* Pt. ii. c. 3.

This brings us to the threshold of the modern era. For Butler here recognizes the fact that, if reason is to interpret and defend revelation, it must, in so doing, to a certain extent become its critic. And the obvious question follows, 'what is its fitness for the task?' In other words, 'what is the nature of reason? what are its capabilities? what are its limits?' This is the problem that Kant took up, and with which his successors have since been occupied. And its critical consideration has created a new epoch in theological, as well as philosophic, thought.

Briefly to resume then: all the leading Christian teachers of the past have fearlessly appealed to reason. The mode of their appeal has varied with the intellectual condition of their various ages; but all have agreed in the conviction that Christianity could be shown to be more rational than any of the rival systems by which it was opposed. At times, of course, authority usurped the place of argument; but the theory on which this took place was that authority represented superior truth. And even when authority was enforced by persecution the theory behind it remained the same; and that theory rested on the intellectual labours of profoundly intellectual men. Christianity did not become less reasonable because St. Dominic persecuted heretics, or because Calvin burned Servetus. In a word, there is a clear distinction between the

intellectual development of theology, and the impolitic methods and immoral motives by which its preaching has at times been marred: the former belongs to the history of doctrine; the latter to the history of the Church. And it is only by a confusion of the two that Christianity can be misrepresented as making for obscurantism and opposed to free thought. On the contrary, Fathers, Schoolmen, and Reformers alike have used, as we have seen, and boldly justified their use of reason. Hence modern criticism is the legitimate outcome of the professed principles of the past. Reason has not now suddenly intruded, for the first time, upon a system that had never previously pretended to be rational. But a system which has always claimed to be intrinsically rational has been led, by its own logic, as sooner or later it must have been led, to sift and test and criticize the implications of the claim.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CRITICISM OF REASON BY KANT AND HIS SUCCESSORS

THE modern reader of the foregoing pages will have noticed how many critical questions, which to us seem obvious, earlier apologists ignore. And it is very easy in consequence, if we judge them by the latest light of our present philosophy, to make them appear less rational, less trustful of reason than they actually were. This was the way of reading history which vitiated the criticism of the eighteenth century: its tendency to regard all things from its own exclusive point of view. But it is not the sympathetic, the historic method which we employ to-day. And when, in obedience to this method, we read the Christian thinkers of the past in their true context—their connexion, that is, with the intellectual conceptions of their own and not of our age—there can be no doubt whatever of the sincerity and earnestness with which they appeal to reason. They assume the rationality of revelation: that nothing revealed can be irrational, and that nothing irrational can be revealed; and they make the superior rationality of Christianity a test of its truth as against other religions.

But this very rationality gave rise to fresh questions in the course of the last century. For the notion of a revelation, it was urged, implies something which human reason could not have discovered and which appears therefore as superior to reason ; while if such a revelation can only be accepted and ~~accepted~~ <sup>justified</sup> on the ground of its rationality, reason is after all the critic and, to that extent, the superior of revelation. We have seen, for instance, that the very first apologists vindicated Christianity to the Roman world on the ground of its superior morality. But does not this imply that not only in their own minds, but in the minds of those whom they address, there must already be a standard of morality underived from revelation, and yet by which revelation must be judged ? and, if so, how could revelation introduce higher moral conceptions into the world than it already possessed ? The same is the case with theological conceptions—conceptions of the divine nature. The mind must conceive them, and therefore be capable of conceiving them, before it can believe them ; that is, it must test a revelation of God's character by its own preconceived or at least implicit notions of God. How, therefore, can a revelation ever be known as such ? How can it be distinguished from a natural result of our intellectual development ? What is the criterion of a revelation ?

It was inevitable that questions of this kind should

arise, when once the course of philosophic thought had led to the Kantian criticism of the capacity of human reason ; and their discussion continued more or less throughout the nineteenth century. Not, of course, that there had not been abundant criticism of revelation before : for from the moment when the Reformation asserted the right of ~~private~~ judgement against authoritative tradition, such criticism became inevitable, and was always in the air. The Deistic movement in England produced critical attacks of much ability, not only on miracles and prophecy, but on supernatural religion as such ; and though the names of such writers as Tindal, Chubb, Collins, and Woolston are now known only to the student, their influence, especially on the Continent, outlasted their fame, and was an important factor in the general development of subsequent opinion. Later, and partly from English sources, came the French philosophy of the Illumination, unhistoric indeed in its methods, and irrationally negative in its results, but influential from the incisive logic and epigrammatic expression by which, with the characteristic genius of the nation, those results were emphasized. While in Germany a much less negative, and more constructive, form of criticism dates from the theologico-political treatise of Spinoza, and received its most brilliant literary expression at the hands of Lessing.

But the philosophy of the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries made an artificial severance between the mind and its objects, leaving them to confront each other as separate things. Hence religion, whether natural or revealed, was viewed, like any other object, as something independently presented to the mind ; while reason, on the other hand, proceeded *ab extra* to examine its evidence and character. Whereas, in fact, the mind and its objects interpenetrate each other, and this interpenetration must be analysed before either can be rightly understood. Thus behind the question, 'what do we know?' lies the more fundamental one, 'what can we know?' either about religion or anything else ; what are the capabilities, and what are the limitations, of our faculty of knowledge? And it was by raising this question that Kant inaugurated a new epoch in philosophy, which necessarily affected theology as well. The first point which he established was that the mind is not, as Locke and Hume had supposed, a blank tablet (*tabula rasa*), passively receptive of impressions from without ; but that it contributes by its own activity to the formation of every impression which it receives<sup>1</sup>. Thus, we cannot perceive an object except in space, or an event except in time, or think of either except as the effect of a cause. Yet we do not perceive space and time ; they are the form or framework into which, in the very act

<sup>1</sup> See Note 1.

of perceiving, we fit the objects of our perception ; translating what would otherwise be mere sensations into objects of perception by the fact : they are the necessary forms of our intuitions or perceptions. Still more obviously, we do not perceive cause ; which is, in like manner, a form of our understanding, something which our mind brings with it and reads into the outside world as distinct from what is given to it from without. Kant's own analysis of these 'forms' of perception and understanding has been variously criticized and modified ; but his main doctrine—that the mind co-operates in the creation of its own experience, that 'nothing is, but thinking makes it so'—remains untouched. It is one of those truths indeed which, when once pointed out, cannot fail to be recognized as obvious.

Starting then from this position, Kant proceeded to maintain that we can know nothing except what is thus qualified or conditioned by our own mind ; nothing, that is, but what we can perceive in space and time or develop through the forms and categories of our understanding ; in other words, phenomena or appearances ;—things as they appear to us. Of things in themselves, or things as they really are, apart from their appearance, which he called *noumena*, Kant maintained that we can know nothing, however much we may believe them to exist. And foremost among such noumena are God and the soul : we cannot therefore have any



knowledge, i.e. any speculative knowledge, or knowledge properly so-called of either. But, on the other hand, we are conscious of a moral law within the mind, commanding us with absolute authority to do and to forbear—a categorical imperative; and this implies that we are free<sup>1</sup>. Further, we feel that the moral law ought to triumph in us completely; that we ought to obey conscience perfectly—to be perfectly virtuous. And as we never are or can be so in this finite life, our soul must be immortal, or else its fundamental instinct would be untrue. Again, we feel that virtue *ought* to involve happiness, not as an arbitrary reward, but as part of the fitness of things; and this not merely the partial happiness of internal satisfaction, 'the wages of going on, and still to be,' but the complete happiness that can only arise from entire harmony with our environment; a state in which external nature shall wholly subserve virtue. And as we have no power of ourselves to bring this about, virtue having no ability whatever to control external nature, there must be One who can realize this end, and that is God. Thus God and the soul in its freedom and immortality are shown to be postulates of our moral nature or (in Kant's phrase) our practical reason. We must believe in them, as being essential to the ultimate triumph of morality, and our conscience tells us that morality

<sup>1</sup> See Note 2.

must ultimately triumph. Though therefore we can have no speculative knowledge of God and the soul, as they are 'in themselves,' yet we can be practically certain that they exist; and that not merely as a matter of faith or feeling, but as a demand or postulate of our practical reason, i. e. of our reason analysing what is involved in the moral law.

These then are, in brief outline, the central points of the Kantian system: first, that the mind co-operates in the creation of its own experience; secondly that, as a consequence of this, we can only know the world as it appears to us, or the phenomenal world; thirdly that though, as a further consequence, we can have no knowledge either of the existence of God or of the freedom or immortality of the soul, yet these are necessary postulates or demands of our practical reason; regulative ideas, or ideas by which we regulate our conduct, as distinct from speculative ideas, or ideas which convey knowledge properly so called. It is obvious that the first and second of these positions by no means necessitate the third, and indeed can easily be turned, as they soon were by some of Kant's successors, into arguments against it. For it may very naturally be maintained that if we can know nothing but phenomena, we have no right to speak of any reality behind them; and agnosticism is the result. But this was most emphatically not Kant's own view or intention. His main interest

was to establish our belief in God and the soul; and hence he emphasizes the primacy of the practical reason, its pre-eminence over all else. And he uses his doctrine of the limitation of all knowledge to phenomena, not for the purpose of weakening our belief in God and the soul, but for the purpose of strengthening it against sceptical attacks; by showing that all such attacks involve an illegitimate use of reason, an attempt to employ it in a region where it cannot act. For the same cause that we cannot demonstrate God's existence to the intellect, neither can we deny it; and hence the positive affirmation of our moral consciousness is lifted above all possibility of intellectual disproof. Conscience affirms God; and the intellect is powerless to deny Him.

Great philosophers, like great poets, have their own individual way of looking at the world. Their work is coloured by their personality, and the unity of their system is due less to its intrinsic coherence than to the unity of the mind that gave it birth. They are never really so consistent as they imagine themselves to be. Hence, while scientific discoveries, when once established, are permanent and final, passing, after their authors are long forgotten, into the impersonal inheritance of the race; philosophical 'systems have their day, they have their day and cease to be': they lose their unity and cease to be systems, with the

disappearance of the genius which created them. But they do not therefore cease to be powers in the world. Thought has been advanced by them ; pregnant suggestions have been thrown out ; fresh light has been shed upon old problems ; new avenues opened before the mind. Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz have no literal, uncritical adherents in the world to-day, but each has made his own addition to the course of philosophic thought.

And so it was with Kant. There were inconsistencies in his system, and his disciples soon became his critics. But the points which he emphasized, and the direction which he gave to the course of philosophic thought, determined the whole of its subsequent development. He had proved, once for all, that there is a mental initiative in knowledge ; that it is the activity of the mind which converts sensations into perceptions, and perceptions into conceptions or objects of thought, and connects these objects with each other by bringing them into relation with itself, in what he calls the synthetic unity of apperception. And modern psychology has traced the same process in its more elementary stages, and shown that not only is the mental act of 'attention' necessary before any impression can be received from without, but that even in the lowest organisms to which we can attribute any degree of conscious

life, something analogous to attention takes place, upon the occurrence of any external interference. But when Kant proceeded from this point to his distinction between appearance and reality (phenomena and noumena) he was less satisfactory. We can know nothing, he maintained, as we have already stated, of noumena or things in themselves, because they lie outside the range of our mental categories. But, on the other hand, we are obliged to conceive these noumena to be the realities of which phenomena are the appearances, that is, to be the substance or cause of phenomena. But substance and cause are mental categories, and thus we cannot think or speak of noumena at all, without contradicting their supposed nature in the very act. Either, therefore, there are no such things as noumena, or they can in a measure be known; or, to put it otherwise, our forms of thought are not such as to preclude us from contact with reality.

Thus Kant inevitably led to Hegel, whose position, though the very converse of his own, resulted from the development of his initial doctrine of the creative character of thought. For according to the Hegelian view reality is not an unintelligible thing in itself, lying behind those appearances—

‘of eye and ear, both what they half create,  
And what perceive’—

but, on the contrary, 'the curtain is the picture,' *the appearance or phenomenon is the reality*, just because and in so far as it is an object of thought. Thus the more we know about a thing, or the more intelligible it is to us—in other words, the more intimately connected with all our other thoughts—the more real does it become for us, and so 'only what is rational is real.' When a boy, for example, picks up a stone to throw at a bird, he only knows that it is hard, and heavy, and therefore a convenient missile; and this accordingly is the extent of its reality for him. But if a man of science were to pick up the same stone, he would know more about it—its chemical composition and affinities, its geological character and origin, the particular cause, perhaps, of its present position, or the marks of human agency upon it—and these things would link it in his mind with a vast series of scientific generalizations, throwing light upon the earth's history and the antiquity of man. Thus the stone would become an object of thought for him, a centre of countless intellectual relations; no merely accidental occurrence, but part of an ordered world, and therefore, because more rational, infinitely more real. To the same effect one might contrast Wordsworth's

'A primrose by a river's brim  
A yellow primrose was to him,  
And it was nothing more.'

with Tennyson's 'Flower in the crannied wall'—

‘If I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.’

The flower is more real to the philosopher than to the peasant, because it is more charged with meaning, more intelligible or rational.

Now, on the one hand, this intelligibility or rationality of the world is due to the creative activity of the human mind with its forms of thought. For it is the mind which unites, and correlates, and compares, and classifies the data of experience, till it has reduced them to scientific order, and shown their philosophical significance. But, on the other hand, this order, which the human mind creates, corresponds with external fact, as is shown, for instance, by the ability of science to predict future events. Thus the rationality of the world is not merely a result of our human way of viewing things a subjective attribute with which we invest them, as when we look through coloured glass. It is already there; it is objective; there is reason in the world, reason immanent, or built into the structure of things; the whole constitution of the universe is rational, and must therefore proceed from a divine reason, and one which our ability to recognize its presence proves to be akin to our own. While, however, the human reason,

at least under its present conditions, cannot attain to complete knowledge, and therefore cannot fully grasp reality, the divine reason is complete knowledge, and thereby constitutes reality. It follows that the element in things which the human mind does not yet know, the unknown element, is not to be contrasted with the known element, in Kantian fashion, as if the former were the reality, and the latter only a phenomenon or mode of appearance. On the contrary, the two are stages in the same process of knowledge, what is known being what has already become real for us, and what is unknown being what has not yet become real. This applies, among other things, to God and the soul, which for Kant were unknowable things-in-themselves, or noumena. We have an incomplete but real knowledge of both. Thus we have a real knowledge of the soul in its manifestations—reason, and the power of reason to read the laws of the universe in science and philosophy; freedom, or self-determination, and the power of freedom to create for itself moral life, and social order, and political organization; love, the source of sacrifice, and through sacrifice of union, its inspiration of art, its aspiration after immortality. These are not merely appearances of something unknowable behind them; they are the thing itself; for the soul is what it does, and its definition is its history. In the same way, God may be known



through His manifestation in the order and evolution of the world, and more adequately through His action on the mind of man, inspiring the individual, and guiding the race, in ways of reason and liberty and love. To the extent that these are known, God is known.

It is of course notoriously difficult to represent Hegel's teaching, in other language than his own, without considerable danger of misrepresenting it. But the above statement will at any rate show the general significance of his doctrine, that 'the rational is the real,' as contrasted with the position of Kant. But Hegel, like Kant, very soon gave rise to two opposite schools of interpretation, which parted upon the question of the relation between human reason and divine. Hegel considered himself to be not only a Theist, but a Christian. It may be fairly maintained, therefore, that he viewed human and divine reason, in the manner stated above, as separate though kindred things; kindred in their nature, but sufficiently separate, in their mode of existence, to allow of the distinction between divine and human personality being preserved. But some of his followers took the opposite view, that the two are identical; that God, in fact, becomes conscious of Himself through the mind of man, with Pantheism as the inevitable result. Thus, just as Kant's moral Theism had been distorted into Agnosticism, Hegel's intellectual

Theism was mistranslated into Pantheism ; in each case by the disciples against the intention of their master.

Thus Kant and Hegel represent in sharp antithesis the two opposite poles of thought between which idealism moves ; the two types towards one or other of which it must inevitably approximate ; with the theological consequences that they respectively involve. Their common starting-point is, as we have seen, that the mind is never a passive mirror of impressions ; but that it actively co-operates in the constitution of all our experience, and therefore of all our knowledge. We can know nothing that is not shaped and toned and coloured by our own categories or forms of thought. But there are two very different ways in which this truth may be interpreted. We may emphasize the negative aspect of our forms of thought—the fact that they limit and confine us to things human—and preclude the possibility even of conjecturing what may or may not be beyond. This will land us in subjective idealism—the view that we fashion our own world for ourselves, and have no means of testing its ulterior validity. The logical consequence of such a creed is of course Agnosticism on all questions of religion. While even if, for any independent reason, emotional or moral, we decline this consistent conclusion and believe in God, our belief must still be of an

agnostic nature. We may believe in God, but we can predicate nothing of Him, since all our notions are merely human and subjective. We cannot therefore apply to Him any attributes drawn from our finite modes of thought, not even those which we call moral; and if we are told that He has revealed Himself we cannot test the revelation. This was not indeed Kant's own position, because, as we have seen above, his view of the practical reason was already leading him beyond it—leading him indeed in the positive direction which was afterwards developed by Hegel. But it was the logical conclusion to be drawn from his denial of our ability to know things-in-themselves, and has been adopted in consequence by various thinkers. On the other hand, we may lay stress upon the positive aspect of our mental categories or modes of thought; the fact that though they constitute the world for us, they constitute it in accordance with external law. Thus we infer the existence of a planet from our mathematics, and find, on surveying the heavens, that it is there. We reconstruct an organism from a fossil bone, and the result is verified by subsequent discovery. We predict the action of chemical or electrical forces, and experiment justifies the prediction. Or, again, we discover a moral law within us which makes for righteousness, yet is plainly not ourselves. All these are indications that our reason is in harmony

with the reason in the world, the divine reason; and the obvious corollary is that our human thought must be akin to the divine. Man therefore must be capable of understanding God, and God of being understood by man; and we can form conceptions of His character by which to criticize and therefore to recognize His revelation. Such is the direction, simply stated, in which Hegel developed Kant.

There is, of course, no fundamental novelty in either of these positions. For idealism, the conviction that the world is ultimately rational or spiritual, is as old as philosophy itself, and dates in the western world from Plato. But its earlier modes of statement had become inadequate, and were successively discredited. And the significance of Kant and Hegel—viewed as two stages in one process of thought—is that they critically reconstructed idealism, in the face of all that could be said against it; showing that it really underlay all science, no less than all theology, and therefore precluded any ultimate severance of the two; since no knowledge at all would be possible, if the world were not adapted to be known; if it were not, in other words, an embodiment of ideas, and ideas, which in the last resort must be divine. But while the main course of philosophic thought was moving in the above direction, a mystical reaction was being inaugurated by Schleiermacher,

which had an important effect on the theory of religion. Schleiermacher, though a man of philosophic culture and profoundly influenced by philosophy, was himself rather a theologian than a philosopher. And starting with the fact of personal religion, ~~the~~ religious experience of the individual, he maintained that feeling, as distinct both from morality and theology, was the root and essence of all religion. We have a feeling of absolute dependence, through the universe, upon the power which upholds the universe, and this feeling is religion. Reason may come afterwards and arrange our thoughts upon the subject; and morality will also follow. But religion does not consist either in doing our duty, or in the views which we hold about God, but in the feeling which underlies and gives its character to these things. This feeling is rather a passive than an active state, a sense that the divine life which animates the universe is being realized in and through us—a sense of oneness with the universal whole. And where this is present the intellectual conceptions under which it subsequently formulates itself are unimportant; even to the extent that we may think of God indifferently as personal or impersonal, according to the aspect of His ~~being~~ which we emphasize, in the latter case His reason, and in the former His will. We need not follow the development of this doctrine into its details,

which would possess no more than an antiquarian interest at the present day. For it was obviously a partial and one-sided view which could not be systematically maintained. But at the root of it lay the old emotional mysticism, the religion of the heart, combined with Spinoza's 'intellectual love of God,' which 'is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves Himself.' And its significance lay in the reassertion of this all-important element of religion, when, in a philosophic age, it was in much danger of being overlooked; its plea for feeling as against a merely moral or merely intellectual creed. Schleiermacher is not, of course, to be classed as a thinker with either Kant or Hegel. But his influence was widespread and profound, and he is the typical representative in his generation of those theologians who emphasize emotion in religion.

Of subsequent German thinkers we need only, for our present purpose, mention Lotze, who, while criticizing Kant and Hegel, carried on the philosophic movement which they began. Like them he is not always consistent, and liable therefore to diverse interpretations, but his main contention is clear. He objects to Hegel for unduly neglecting experience, in his desire to exhibit the world as a rational system. There is much in our experience, he points out, which is of emotional and moral origin, coming to us in the way of sense and

feeling, and faith, and inspiration, which our intellect can recognize, but cannot represent in the form of ideas, or reduce to knowledge in the proper sense of the term. Such experience therefore is apprehended by our entire personality rather than by our strictly cognitive faculty or reason. 'It is everywhere the whole mind at once thinking, feeling, and passing moral judgements, which, out of the full completeness of its nature produces in us those unspoken first principles to which our perception seeks to subordinate the content of experience.' And foremost among these principles are our judgements of value or worth. We feel that certain things, as beauty, goodness, love, have worth, and that this is a higher category than truth; the True, being a means to the Good, in which it is comprehended. 'The fact that there is truth at all,' he says, 'cannot in itself be understood, and is only comprehensible in a world, the whole nature of which depends upon the principle of the Good.' In other words, to say that the world is intelligible is to say that it has a final cause, a purpose, a meaning, an end towards which it moves, and whose attainment is its good; and what is true of the whole is equally true of its parts; we do not understand things simply by analysing their structure or composition, but by discerning their place in this universal system, their relation to the purpose of the world. Hence the

true realm of reality consists of personal beings—since only such can realize ideal ends, or objects of worth—and centres in God, ‘in whom alone perfect personality is to be found, while in all finite spirits there exists only a weak imitation of personality; the finiteness of the finite is not a productive condition of personality, but rather a hindering barrier to its perfect development.’ And the bond of this realm of reality is Love, which has ‘eternal and supreme worth.’

We have selected these four names for comparison—Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Lotze—not with a view to examining their systems in general, or their treatment of Christianity in particular, but because they are typical representatives of the chief moments or stages, in that movement of thought which influenced the philosophy of religion during the last century, as much in England as in Germany; while each of them emphasized an important element in the religious consciousness to which we shall subsequently have to recur; Kant, the will; Hegel, the reason; Schleiermacher, the feeling; and Lotze, the complex personality which unites and harmonizes them all.



## CHAPTER III

### THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE KNOWLEDGE

IT will have appeared, from the brief account in the previous chapter, that the movement of thought during the first half of the nineteenth century—the movement from Kant to Hegel—tended to emphasize the capacity of reason. Kant held that we are incapable of attaining to any knowledge of ultimate reality except in the moral region—the moral law, with its unearthly investiture of absolute authority—its categorical imperative. But Hegel saw that Kant was, herein, granting too much not to grant more; that to know any ultimate reality is potentially to know all; since it is only possible from the fact that reason and reality are intimately akin; and hence, that in every region of its activity reason can recognize reality, because that reality is its own counterpart, the likeness of itself. In principle this was a reassertion, though a critical and reflective reassertion or development, of the doctrine of Plato and Aristotle, the early Christian philosophers, and St. Thomas, all of whom had emphasized the close

connexion between human reason and divine, and our consequent capacity for knowing things as they are, or the reality of things. But philosophers are always in danger of falling into abstraction. Kant and Schleiermacher, as we have seen, did so, each isolating one element in human nature to the exclusion or under-estimate of the rest. And though Hegel's aim was to apprehend the world in all its concrete complexity, he too had the defect of his virtue, and gave too exclusive a prominence to reason, both in the constitution and the recognition of reality. Whereas in fact the whole of our nature co-operates in the acquisition of knowledge, and especially of that highest knowledge which we are at present considering—theology and the philosophy of religion. This has been pointed out by many of Hegel's successors besides Lotze, and in various ways. But instead of attempting to follow them in detail, which would tend rather to confuse than to clarify the subject, we will illustrate the process by which knowledge grows.

The knowledge of nature has often been compared to the reading of a book; and the analogy will bear pressing into detail. Suppose the case of a man who can only read English, presented with a printed page that he cannot decipher. He can see at once that the language is foreign, and that is all. Then comes a schoolboy who has

acquired knowledge enough to read Greek, without translating it. He pronounces the page to be Greek, and by reading it aloud is able to show us that Greek is a melodious language, but no more. Then comes a better scholar who translates the passage into English for us, whereon we discover it to be a philosophical argument—and one with which we are indisposed to agree. Finally there comes a philosopher who *recognizes* the passage, tells us that it comes from Plato, and is the statement of an objection which is answered in the following page.

Now first as regards the book; notice that its intelligibility, its capacity for being understood, depends entirely upon its internal and external relations. Its individual letters are constituted by the *arrangement* of their component lines; its words by the *order* of their letters; the meaning of its separate sentences by the *inflection* of their component words; its contained argument by the particular *combination* of its sentences; while finally the whole passage is qualified by its *context*—that invisible context of which only the Platonic student is aware. But ‘arrangement,’ ‘order,’ ‘inflection,’ ‘combination,’ and ‘context’ are not the names of things, but of relations; relations without which the page in question would be a mere chaos of unmeaning marks; relations moreover which could not produce intelligibility, if they were not in

themselves intellectual; products, that is, of a mind whose object was to convey a meaning that could be understood. So much for the intelligibility of the book.

Turning then to the intelligence of its reader, we notice that his power of understanding it is conditioned by the previous knowledge which he brings with him to the task. To the man who merely brings eyesight without further knowledge it is only a collection of curious characters; to the schoolboy a piece of melodious Greek; to the scholar an intelligible but questionable argument; while only the Platonist, who is familiar with the passage from having seen it before, is fully aware of its meaning and scope.

Thus on the one side we have an intelligent reader; one, that is, who possesses the pre-suppositions which are necessary for dealing with the subject in hand—such as eyesight, knowledge of the Greek character, the Greek language, the Greek philosophy, and finally familiarity with the writings of Plato in particular. On the other side we have an intelligible book, one that is capable of being understood. While as soon as these two, the book and its reader, are brought into connexion, a fresh set of relations is established—relations between the mind and the book; and these may be described either by saying that the mind brings the book into relation with itself, or

that the mind is brought into relation with the book. Thus the resulting knowledge means the establishment of a relationship between the mind and its object which is only possible because the two are already akin.

Now at first sight this may seem a purely intellectual process, but on reflection we shall see that it is not so. To begin with, the gradual preparation of the mind that we have traced is due to a series of acts, a continuous activity; and activity is a function of life. Thus thought is a mode of life, a way in which life expresses itself. And further, acts imply will; and the successive acts, which result in learning Greek and studying philosophy, can only have arisen from a continuous exercise of will, through years of patient industry, or a determination, as we say, to achieve the end in view. While, again, the will requires motives in the form of desires: there must have been a desire to learn Greek, and a desire to read Plato, before the will could resolve, and whatever the precise nature of this desire, it must have been more or less emotional. Thus the ability to read a book, and much more to appreciate a philosopher is the outcome, not of our mind alone, but of our total personality, in which feeling, thought, and will are insensibly and inseparably blended, crossing and recrossing each other like subtle threads in a complex web. While, on the other side,

the book in question is a similar summary of its author's personality, not only of his genius, but of his moral character and spiritual history—all that his joys and sorrows, loves and hates, and hopes and fears have made him. And it is only in proportion as our own experience corresponds with that of the philosopher that we can adequately estimate his work: so that the relationship, described above, between the reader and the book, is not merely intellectual, but living, emotional, and moral—or in one word personal.

Now it will be obvious that this account of the process of knowledge applies to all cases in which its object is the product of human agency, and therefore the embodiment of human thought, such as the understanding of a piece of machinery, or the appreciation of a work of art, a statue, or a picture, or a musical composition; or, again, to the sagacity of a statesman or a general, or a judge, dealing directly with human beings in their different capacities; or, again, to that intimate insight which men gradually acquire into the character of those whom they love. In each case the relation between the mind and its object is one of kinship: the mind recognizes its own likeness in the object, sees itself reflected there, finds in the object a second self, which in consequence it is able to understand. In each case therefore it is what the mind brings with it to the task that

makes knowledge possible; its forms of thought, its presuppositions, its educational preparation and character; and in proportion as these are complex, and adequate, and various, will be the completeness of the knowledge wherein they result. And though the different objects above mentioned appeal differently to us, some requiring more use of the intellect and others of the feelings or the will, yet the whole personality is, as we have seen, involved, if not perceptibly in every action, at least in the preparation which precedes and qualifies every action of the mind. These characteristics of the process of knowledge are obviously easier to trace when the object of the knowledge in question is human personality or the products of human personality. But there cannot be two kinds of knowledge, and the same characteristics therefore will be found to recur in all other regions of the intellectual life. Broadly speaking, these regions may be divided into two: that of the special sciences which isolate and analyse separate departments of our total experience, and that of philosophy, 'the contemplation of all time and all existence,' which endeavours to grasp the meaning of our experience in its entirety; and the light which, when viewed as a whole, it throws upon the Universe and God.

If then we take the case of a science, say astronomy, the mind begins by bringing with it

to the study those forms of perception and thought which are the necessary prerequisites, as Kant has shown us, of all experience. And then what makes the science possible? The fact that definite mathematical relationships obtain throughout the sidereal system, relationships which are essentially akin to our own processes of thought. And, further, how do we discover these relationships? By forming hypotheses or theories and comparing them with the facts of the external world. We make calculations, that is to say, in our own minds, and if need be alter and correct them, till we find that they correspond with and account for the various movements of the stars. Thus we find the results of our thinking reproduced in the outer world; we recognize our own thoughts in it, precisely as we do in the case of a book; it becomes intelligible, or in other words, one with our own intellect. And what is true in one case is true in all: science is only possible because the human reason finds itself reflected in the Universe—finds, embodied in the course and constitution of all outward things, intellectual principles which are identical with its own. Nor, again, is science, even the most abstract, merely a mental creation. For it will be obvious that its successful pursuit must involve the same preliminary discipline that we saw to be needed for the appreciation of a book—a discipline in which moral and emotional



elements play an important part. And the importance of moral character to the success of mental ability is recognized in the well-known definition of genius as 'an infinite capacity for taking pains.' Thus though science viewed in itself is simply systematized knowledge, a purely intellectual thing, the process of its acquisition or advancement calls all the forces of our personality in one degree or another into play.

And what is true in the realm of science, is true, *a fortiori*, in philosophy, the other great region of thought. For philosophy, however we define it, is an attempt to understand the meaning of the universe ; how, and why, and what, things ultimately are ; the purpose and the destiny of all that exists : and this will obviously include or coincide with speculative theology which was in fact its earlier, Aristotelian name. But any attempt to understand the universe presupposes that it is intelligible, which means, as we have already seen, that it is akin to our own mind. We demand, for example, a unity among all the multiplicity of phenomena ; a principle that shall link past and present, near and distant things together, and maintain stability beneath their change. And the source of this demand is the spiritual unity of which we are conscious in ourselves. We are aware of a principle within us, call it what we may, that connects all the objects and events of our manifold experience

together, and thus invests them with a unity which they would not otherwise possess, through their relation to one subject or self. And as we, each of us, thus unify our own microcosm or miniature world; so we postulate a similar principle in the universe at large, as the necessary condition of its being that united whole which its very name implies. The aim then of philosophy is to justify this postulate by tracing the indications of spiritual presence in the world; while to interpret those indications we again have recourse to ourselves, and the modes in which spirit, as we know it, acts. Our spirit, for example, claims to subordinate material things to moral, necessity to freedom, hostility to love. We look therefore for a corresponding character in the order and processes of the universe, and in proportion as we find or fail to find it, are intellectually encouraged or perplexed. Thus from beginning to end the aim of philosophy, the attempt to understand the world as a whole, is an attempt to find ourselves reflected in it, at home in it, at one with it—to find that it is *alter ego*, a second self. But our relation to the world as a whole, and to the spirit which the world reveals, is much more complex than our relation to the separate parts of it which the several sciences explore; for it involves our entire personality. Not only does its intellectual aspect, its manifestation of mind, appeal to our reason; but the beauty

of its sights and sounds, and all the human love that it includes arouse our emotions; and the demands—the imperative demands—of the moral law upon the conscience stir our will. While if these things lead us further, to believe in a God, who is sufficiently akin to us to be known, a fresh set of relationships ensues—faith, fear, hope, obedience, worship, love,—in a word, religion. The philosophic view of the world therefore must take account of all these things; and to estimate them rightly the philosopher must possess that kind of insight which arises from the blending of emotional, moral, and religious experience with intellectual ability; as Plato clearly saw when in the dawn of philosophy he prescribed the conditions of its successful pursuit. Hence philosophic knowledge, above all other, is qualified by the personality of its possessor; not only by his mental education, though even that, as we have seen, involves moral ingredients, but by all the manifold experience that has gone to make him what he is—those ‘years that bring the philosophic mind.’

To return then to our illustration: the process of acquiring any kind of knowledge is analogous, in its main conditions, to the study of a book. In every case the mind brings with it, not only its essential categories or forms of thought, but a number of other predispositions, due to character and education, some of which are general, and

others individual ; while the degree of knowledge attained depends upon the adequacy and appropriateness of these personal presuppositions. For to know a thing is, as we said above, to find our mind reflected in it, and the greater the content of the mind, the greater also will be that of its reflexions ; or to put it from the other side, however much potential knowledge may be awaiting us, however many things capable of being known, only so much can in any case become actual as is capable of being brought into relation with what the mind already knows, and is in this sense akin to the mind. Thus we cannot anticipate the science of the future, because we do not yet possess the intermediate links which will one day connect it with and make it congenial to our own. It is a book whose language we do not yet understand.

Now we saw how the meaning of a book can only be discovered from the book in its entirety : since the propositions stated on one page may be qualified or refuted by what follows ; so that to understand a single page or chapter properly, we must know its complete context. And the same principle holds good of all knowledge. For the universe being one, as its name implies, a connected system, an organic whole, all its parts are bound together by relationships of varying complexity ; and thus every part, every single object, every particular event, has nothing less than the remainder of the universe

for its context : whence, obviously, perfect knowledge is only possible to a mind possessed of this universal context, that is, to the universal or divine mind.

Hence two methods are possible in the pursuit of knowledge. We may study objects and events in connexion with their context, or as much of their context as we can discover, and so obtain as far as possible a concrete view of them, a view of them as they actually exist or occur. But as we can never know the context of anything completely, there will always be an indefinite fringe around such knowledge, an unknown environment whose modifying influence we have no ability to estimate. Whence our knowledge of things in their context, or things as they actually are, however true as far as it goes, must always be more or less provisional and incomplete.

To remedy this defect we may adopt the opposite method ; we may isolate things from their context by abstraction, and leaving all unknown or complicating relations out of question, confine our study to a particular aspect of the object-matter before us ; as in arithmetic, for instance, we isolate and analyse number in the abstract, or in geometry the relations of space. In this case we know all the conditions of our problem, because we have framed those conditions for ourselves. We can consequently attain exact knowledge, but only within

the limits that we have thus artificially created ; knowledge of objects that are all more or less ideal or hypothetical, not of things or persons, or events as they actually exist or occur. Thus abstract knowledge, by the very process which enables it to become accurate, loses contact with reality in the ordinary sense of the word. This distinction is of course a relative one. For all human knowledge is to a certain extent abstract, since it isolates objects from part of their universal context—that part, namely, which we do not know. While, on the other hand, abstract knowledge varies immensely in the degree of its abstraction ; some sciences, like algebra or geometry, dealing with a single aspect or quality of objects ; and others, like chemistry or biology, with such complex groups of phenomena that their essentially abstract character easily escapes notice at first sight.

Nevertheless there is a very real difference between abstract and concrete knowledge or thinking ; and as it is not always clearly recognized, an illustration or two may be of use. Take arithmetic, for example, the simplest branch of mathematics. It deals with number in the abstract, as every school-boy knows when he is taught that he must not try to divide twelve oranges by three apples, but simply twelve by three ; while savage races who cannot make this elementary abstraction, and think only in the concrete, as of one horse or two sheep, are unable, in

consequence, to count more than three or four. But by making rigid abstraction of number, isolating it, that is from all other qualities and studying it alone, arithmetic is enabled to make an exhaustive analysis of the various numerical relations, with results of the highest importance for practical affairs and concrete things. Yet all the while no such thing as a mere number or numerical relationship exists outside the mind. The whole science is a mental creation, and its results are only of universal validity within the mind. Apply them to the actual world of fact and they require at once to be modified and qualified in various ways ; otherwise they would issue in untruth or absurdity. A general, for instance, may dispatch troops in sufficient numerical proportion to crush his enemy, yet be foiled because they are cowards, while the enemy are brave. A contractor may calculate the exact number of workmen required to execute his contract, yet fail because they strike or waste their time. An engineer may erect a bridge which is correct in its mathematical proportions, yet collapses from the use of unsound material, fraudulently supplied. Or, to vary the nature of the illustration, if one man could do a given piece of work in ten days, ten men, on arithmetical principles, could finish it in one day ; but if the work were a poem or a picture this would be obviously untrue. In other words, men and things, in the concrete, have other attributes than

that of number, any one of which may modify or neutralize their numerical significance.

It is of course very easy to see the truth of this in the case of so highly abstract a science as mathematics; but ~~the~~ same principle holds good *throughout the entire range of knowledge*. For every science isolates its peculiar subject-matter; separates it, that is to say, from the totality of experience, and to this extent makes abstraction of it. Consequently its results are only absolutely valid within the limits which this process of abstraction has artificially created. Chemistry, for instance, can now describe with extreme accuracy the various reactions of the chemical elements in isolation, but it cannot predict their behaviour in an animal organism or a human brain, why the selfsame lime and carbon should form totally different animal structures, or the selfsame phosphorus subserve the production of totally different kinds of thought. And this is not because its analysis is at present inadequate, and may one day be adequate to the task, but because the actual world is no more merely chemical than it is merely numerical. Other than chemical factors intervene and complicate the issue. And so it is with any science that may be named.

On the other hand, as illustrations of concrete knowledge or thought we may take the supreme poets or philosophers who interpret the world as



a whole to us; or the great statesmen, judges, generals, practical men, men of affairs who conduct the business of life on a large scale. These men may be thoroughly trained in the sciences which their respective callings involve; but, over and above such scientific education, they must know human nature at first hand, and not merely as it is described in books, and their success will depend on the ability to see all round a complex problem, to grasp a situation as a whole, to hold a variety of heterogeneous issues before the mind at once and rightly estimate their total drift, to disentangle the resultant of a complicated play of political or social forces. It is the possession of this ability that distinguishes the successful man of action from the doctrinaire; and it is an ability which, though often acting with the unerring sureness of an instinct, is usually founded upon a wide experience of human character in the concrete, human life as it is actually lived. And experience of this kind is never a purely intellectual acquisition, as may be seen from the fact that it is always personal and peculiar, incommunicable to others, inexpressible in language, irreducible to rule. It is the outcome of a varied intercourse with all sorts and conditions of men, in which moral insight and emotional sympathy, with the personal character and history which these qualities imply, will have played quite as important a part as

intellectual acumen. Hence its result is the knowledge, not of any isolated aspect of mankind, such as the statistician or political economist might possess; but of mankind in its context, mankind as it actually lives and loves, and thinks and wills. And it will be noticed that this concrete knowledge, precisely because it is so complex and many-sided, involves, on the principle above stated, a corresponding complexity and variety of presuppositions in its possessor. And this is the reason of its always being, as we have seen, the peculiar property of individuals: its presuppositions are too numerous and subtle to admit of formulation, and cannot therefore be transmitted in the form of a science, but must be acquired anew by each fresh student for himself.

Briefly to recapitulate, then, what we have been saying: the process of knowledge is never a passive reception of impressions upon a blank mind, a *tabula rasa*; it is always an active effort of the mind, and as such involving elements of emotion and will, to find itself reproduced in the outer world, or to recognize the outer world as akin to itself. This process, metaphysically speaking, begins by what is technically called subsuming the world under certain fundamental categories common to all minds, such as those of unity, or energy, or cause; in other words, reading into the outer world those notions which we unquestionably

derive, not from external impression, but from internal reflexion. And the same thing is repeated at every fresh development, and in every fresh department of knowledge; only that as we learn more, we bring with us not merely a few simple categories, but the more and more complex content of a progressively educated mind. Still the procedure is the same. To understand a new experience means to assimilate it to what we have already got in our minds: if the two are in obvious conflict we rearrange the content of our minds, and frame a new hypothesis or theory; but this theory or hypothesis, it must be noticed, is not impressed upon us from without: it is our own mental creation; and we then proceed to compare it with the facts that we could not previously understand, in order to see if they will correspond with this fresh content of our mind. Thus from beginning to end the mind is at work to assimilate the outer world to itself.

Such is the process of acquiring knowledge regarded from the human student's point of view. But it obviously admits of another mode of description. For the very attempt to know the world involves the underlying assumption that the world can be known, or is of an intelligible nature. And every time we frame a new hypothesis as above described, we make a fresh use of this assumption—we are certain that the hitherto

unintelligible object or experience before us is really intelligible, if we could only find its intellectual key. So that from this point of view we might describe the growth of knowledge as the gradual assimilation of the human mind to the intelligible universe. In either case the essential kinship of the two is the obvious condition of all our knowledge, and consequently our knowledge, as resting on this kinship, must be real as far as it goes. But at the same time the fact that the universe is a connected whole gives an element of incompleteness to all our knowledge, since the region that we know may be always liable to modification, by its relations to the infinitely larger region that we do not know. To obviate the uncertainty arising from this incompleteness, we make abstractions of various objects of knowledge; separating them, in our mind, from their universal context, in order to study them by themselves. We are thus enabled to obtain knowledge which is exact, and accurate in proportion to the completeness of our abstraction; and all the special sciences are of this abstract nature, though in different degrees.

But while we thus gain exactness, we lose contact with actuality. Hence if our object is concrete knowledge, knowledge of the actual world in all its complexity, how as a whole it moves—the problem of the practical man, and what as

a whole it means—the problem of the philosopher, we must adopt the opposite method ; and instead of isolating things from their context, we must endeavour to view them as far as possible in their entire context, the totality of their relations to all other things ; remembering the while that as we thus gain actuality, we lose exactitude and certainty, because only a part of that entire context can ever under our present conditions of existence be known. '

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LIMITATIONS OF REASON

THE distinction, to which we have alluded in the foregoing chapter, between abstract and concrete knowledge, illustrates both the capabilities and the limitations of the human reason—using the term in its ordinary English sense, as synonymous with the intellect in general. In some quarters we hear reason spoken of as if it were infallible, and in others decried as if it were intrinsically fallible and weak ; while popular thought very often vacillates in confusion between the two points of view. But it will be apparent from what we have been saying that the validity of reason depends upon its degree of acquaintance with its subject-matter. Where the reason is in complete possession of all its facts—all the data with which it proposes to deal—there, but there only, it can speak with absolute, unqualified authority, and say ‘this *must be* so.’ The best instance of this is in the case of mathematics, the most abstract, and therefore, as we have already seen, the most exact of all the sciences. Here reason has created its own data : there is nothing

in them which the reason has not itself put there ; they contain no unknown residuum, but are rational through and through ; consequently reason can treat them with perfect certainty, and draw infallible deductions. It was this characteristic of mathematical truth which led the older philosophers to speak of it as necessary, or eternal and immutable ; though it really does not differ in kind from other truth, but only in the degree of completeness with which it can be known : and a confusion upon this point led J. S. Mill to think that he could conceive a world in which two and two should make five ; he did not recognize that number, in the abstract, is essentially a mental creation, and that consequently the mind which has created it can speak with absolute precision of its laws. And in proportion as other sciences, like physics or chemistry, can be expressed in terms of mathematics, they admit of being treated with a similar exactitude ; though the results so reached will, it must be remembered, be only abstract results. For directly that we leave the sphere of pure mental creation, and come to experience for our facts, directly, that is, that we touch the concrete world, we are confronted with an unknown element in things. In physics we have 'matter' ; does it exist or not ? in chemistry the chemical elements ; are they ultimately many or one ? in biology living tissue ; is vitality a dis-

tinct property or force? in sociology human personality; is man only an animal, or an immortal being? We neither know, in the last analysis, what these things are, nor—which is another phrase for the same thing—their relations to the rest of the universe. By observation and experiment we gradually discover the laws to which they conform, and are thus enabled to predict with accuracy their behaviour under similar conditions; as the many brilliant triumphs of applied science abundantly prove. Now, in dealing with these things reason acts accurately, within the region of what it knows; but this region is intimately connected with an unknown environment; an environment which we assume to be as intelligible as that which we already know, but which we do not as yet understand. And as long as this is the case, all our empirical knowledge must remain incomplete, and to that extent hypothetical; true within limits, but liable to indefinite modification as we know more. And this is what has given rise to the vilification (to use Butler's expression) of reason, as if it were intrinsically weak, or essentially limited. In reality it is neither the one nor the other. On the contrary, where it knows the whole of its subject-matter it judges with an authority and certainty that admits of no appeal; it has no inherent weakness. Neither has it any limits *de jure*, but only *de facto*. Its



claim to know anything implies, as we have seen, a claim to know everything, for it implies a conviction that the universe is intelligible, and therefore can be known, and with every advance of knowledge our intellectual limitations recede. Consequently the limits of reason are not essential to it; they are only actually great because our unknown environment is so vast. We in no way degrade reason therefore or under-estimate its authority by admitting the circumscription of its scope.

The above-mentioned limitation is obviously incidental to human reason as such, that is to all human reason, whenever, and wherever it acts. But though reason, the whole world over, has certain common characteristics which enable us to speak of it in this way, yet its action is carried on through individual human minds: and this fact gives rise to another important class of limitations, especially where concrete knowledge is involved. For in every individual human being or person, reason, feeling, and will are so inseparably intertwined, as to be capable of only partial discrimination. In bygone days this fact was not sufficiently understood, and the faculties of the soul were regarded in consequence as much more distinct and distinguishable than they actually are. But the intimacy of their fusion is now universally recognized: the three faculties—if we may still so

call them—continually act and react upon each other, with the result that, in practice, will and feeling are always transfused with thought; while thought is directed and modified by feeling and will. Man lives before he thinks; and his earliest life is one of feeling, prompting instinctively to effort—which is the germ of will. First an infant seeks the breast; and then as he develops, a variety of feelings of attraction and repulsion issue in a corresponding variety of actions; establishing nerve currents, and moulding the basis of character, long before the dawn of anything that can be dignified with the name of thought. Consequently when reason awakes, it is already the reason of a person with an inchoate character; with likes and dislikes, and instincts and interests, and tendencies; which have partly come down from ancestors, and partly been shaped by surrounding circumstance, and are partly the ‘peculiar difference’ of each individual. And the consequence of this is, that in addition to those universal categories common to all reason, we have each of us an infinitude of particular, personal categories, presuppositions, preconceptions, prepossessions, under which we view the world. We see this fact writ larger in the distinction between national modes of thought, Oriental and Western views of life, for instance, or French, English, and German philosophy; or again in the way in which different classes of a community

regard things from different points of view. Let a soldier, a painter, a poet, a farmer look at the same landscape, and they will each see different things in it, for their interests being different will prompt them to select for attention different aspects of the complex whole; while even of individuals no two see exactly alike. And it will be obvious moreover that these personal prepossessions vary indefinitely in value; some of them representing superior insight, others special knowledge; others prejudice, bigotry, ignorance, unconscious bias; the various 'idols' of which Bacon spoke.

Here then we have another serious limitation to the action of reason; for when we desire to obtain a rational view of any subject, it will be necessary to eliminate all irrational prepossessions from our mind, all that hinder what we call an impartial or unbiased judgement. And this is no easy task. It is possible enough, indeed, in the case of abstract mathematics, because this, as we have already seen, is a purely mental creation, and therefore wholly open to our view; its terms imply nothing more than our own definitions have put into them. But difficulty begins as soon as the subject-matter of our inquiry grows complex and concrete; and when we come to the sciences that deal with human life and thought, psychology, ethics, history, or theology, it becomes impossible any longer to eliminate the personal element from

our judgements, and attain a standard of rationality that shall be admissible and acceptable by all; because we must approach these subjects with presuppositions of one kind or another, and the same presuppositions which one man thinks rational, another will consider irrational, not to say absurd. Thus the physiologist and the metaphysician will never agree upon a common method in psychology; a utilitarian and a Kantian will regard ethics with totally different eyes; a Comtist and a Hegelian have different theories of historical development; while the study of theology must be qualified throughout by an initial presumption that it is true or false; and these broad distinctions include a multitude that are more subtle and minute. We will suppose that in each of these cases the man in question has sifted and criticized his own opinions, till he is convinced that they are rational; still this will carry no conviction to his opponent with a different mental history and type of mind; while the very fact that certain opinions seem obviously more rational to a man than others is largely due, as we have seen, to his education and character, in which feeling and will have played an important part. Hence, in concrete matters, in addition to the difficulty arising from our ignorance of their complete context, we are precluded by our inevitable prepossessions from ever attaining an absolutely rational view; one,

that is, that can be universally recognized as such.

"We may further illustrate this difficulty by turning from the subject to the object of knowledge, from the individual thinker to the facts of experience which furnish the material for his thought. We often talk of 'the facts of experience,' and of 'appealing to facts,' of distinguishing fact from theory and 'founding our opinions upon fact' with a very insufficient consciousness of the problems which these familiar phrases involve. Experience is, confessedly, at once the source and criterion of all our knowledge. We can know nothing except by experience, of one kind or another, and we cannot be absolutely certain of anything of which we have had no experience. Now experience of course means, in the last analysis, the experience of individual persons, or personal experience; and when we talk of collective experience we only mean, by the phrase, the collected results of what a number of persons have individually felt. But the field of possible experience is inconceivably larger than the compass of any single mind. Hence of the general knowledge that passes current in the world, each individual can only acquire or verify a very small portion at first hand, that is by personal experience; and in all the ordinary concerns of life he has to utilize the knowledge of other people, knowledge that rests upon another

experience than his own ; precisely as in practical matters we use the manufactures and inventions and appliances of the age, without any understanding of the processes by which they are produced. In other words, we take the greater part of all our ordinary knowledge upon authority—the authority of tradition or of custom, or of popular opinion, or of the aged, or the learned, or the wise, or the good ; while in all technical and scientific questions it is still more obvious that we trust entirely to the authority of expert specialists. This is a practical necessity without which the intercourse and business of the world could not be carried on ; for no man would have either the time or the ability to think out for himself the multitude of ideas and opinions which form the content of his intellectual life. But it follows that only a small fragment of any individual person's knowledge can be called in the strict sense rational ; that fragment, namely, which he has rationalized for himself, or for which he has himself seen the reason. The remainder of his ideas rest on authority, and as long as they continue so to rest, their truth can never be to him more than probable ; and though the degree of this probability may often be so great as to amount to moral certainty, still even moral certainty differs in kind from rational conviction. It follows that the majority of those things which we, each one of us, call

facts are not known to us by our own observation, or by our own deduction from our own observation, but are taken on trust from other people and depend on our faith in their knowledge and veracity. Facts, moreover, are not as distinct from theories as common language would often lead us to suppose. For a fact is a verified hypothesis or theory, and, at one stage or other in the evolution of our race, most if not all of the different things which we now call facts must have passed through this theoretic or hypothetical stage. It is easy to see this in the case of recently established facts. Many of the facts, for instance, of modern chemistry or biology were, within living memory, only theories—theories which subsequent verification has consolidated into facts. Longer ago the elliptical orbits of the planets and their revolution round the sun were theories; whercas now we speak of them as facts. And in the same way a multitude of facts in which we can now discern no theoretic element were theories to primitive man. The same is the case with historic facts: ancient history emerges gradually from mythology, which is a mere embodiment of ideas disguised as facts, and it always remains, to some extent, ideal; its facts are grouped and arranged and coloured in accordance with the theories and tendencies of their reporters; nor can modern historians, with the utmost desire for

impartiality, ever entirely rid themselves of their respective prepossessions, as we may easily see from the fact that no two ever present us with precisely the same picture of any bygone character, situation, or event. Thus the distinction between fact and theory is one of degree rather than of kind, and the 'stubborn things' of popular phraseology turn out upon analysis to have considerable pliancy about them.

Hence we see that the very nature of our experience limits the rationality or reasoned certainty of our knowledge ; because, in the first place, we are obliged to **take most** of what we call the facts of experience at second hand ; and in the next place, even when so taken, the facts in question are seldom so clearly cut and definite—especially in the complex human sciences—as to allow of our deducing from them necessary conclusions ; and necessity is the characteristic of strictly rational knowledge.

The great mass then of the accumulated knowledge which forms the current coin of all intelligent life is, to the individual who makes use of it, hypothetical or probable ; and it is inevitable that this should be the case. Yet hypothetical or probable knowledge never really satisfies our intellect. The craving for knowledge which, as Aristotle says, all men naturally possess, is a craving for certainty. 'I am told that this is true,' 'I feel that this is true,' 'This is likely to be



true,' are not enough for us. What we desire is the ability to say 'I see how and why this must be true.' Thus rationality is always the ideal of our intellectual life ; the goal at which, whether consciously or unconsciously, we aim. Indeed it is, as we have often had occasion to notice, the necessary presupposition of any intellectual life at all ; for the universal desire to understand things implies a universal conviction that they can, in the last resort, be understood, or that the universe is intelligible. And if faith in the world's rationality is thus the initial impulse of all our knowledge, nothing but the ultimate justification of this faith can be its end. It is the constant aim of thought, therefore, to convert probability into certainty, and thus become rational. And all thoughtful persons endeavour to realize this aim, not over the whole field of intellectual possibility, but in some one department or another, the region of their own strongest interest, the things that to them are of chief concern. A scientific specialist is the most obvious example of this. Like the rest of us, he will take his general knowledge, even his general knowledge of other sciences—a geologist, for instance, his chemistry and astronomy—upon the authority of others ; but within his own particular sphere he must verify every fact and criticize every deduction, till he has reached the maximum of attainable certainty. And the same is the case

with professional men, artists, craftsmen; they all endeavour to know their own particular subject at first hand; to translate the lore of it, which they have received from others, into terms of personal experience and personal reflection, and so to know it for themselves; while their ordinary life and conduct has still to be determined by that larger mass of traditional knowledge which they are compelled to accept at second hand. Hence we, all of us, deal habitually with two kinds of knowledge, that which we have verified for ourselves, and of whose truth therefore we are personally certain; and that which we have never verified, and of which therefore at the very utmost we can never be more than morally certain. In those abstract questions, which as we have seen are the only ones that admit of really impartial treatment, the first kind of knowledge is of course more valuable than the second. But in concrete subjects we can never be impartial; for the various prepossessions of heredity and education, and character and surrounding circumstance, to which we have alluded above, can never be eradicated. Many of them are so deeply ingrained in us, so subtly interwoven with the whole texture of our personality, that they are a part of our very nature; and because they are so natural to us they inevitably appear reasonable; and they thus insensibly shape our standards of judgement and canons of criticism

and lead us to one-sided views. Nor can we in these complex subjects ever adequately verify our facts; for they are sure to be too heterogeneous to be reflected within the experience of any one individual mind. We cannot correctly estimate the motives, for instance, of an historical character, or gauge the probabilities of a political situation, to which the range of our own experience furnishes no analogue. And the attempt to understand by the light of our own experience facts for which that experience contains no key, only ends in the falsification of the facts. 'No man is a hero to his valet: not because the hero is no hero, but because the valet is a valet,' as Hegel truly remarks. The lesser has no common experience by which rightly to interpret the larger soul.

'The vulgar saw thy tower, thou sawest the sun.'

Hence the collective wisdom of the race as embodied in its common beliefs, opinions, habits, customs, laws, and other forms of authoritative tradition, is as a rule more trustworthy than the private convictions of its individual members; and we are fully justified therefore in relying on it as we do—in the ordinary conduct of our life and affairs—even to the extent of often using it as a standard by which to correct our personal eccentricities of view. In other words, we cannot rationalize our knowledge, in complex and concrete

subjects; we cannot, that is to say, personally reason it out from personally verified facts.

Human reason, in fact, is far more practical than theoretic. Man has often been defined as a rational animal, but his real distinction is rather his free-will or power of self-determination than his reason. For he is essentially an agent; he acts from the moment of his birth; he acts long before he thinks; and will is the faculty of action. It is the will that forms our character, and gives us value and worth; not what we have felt or thought, but what we have willed and so become, as the result of all our thoughts and feelings. Reason is a necessary condition of this self-determination, since it enables us to frame ideal motives, and deliberate between them; and it is in this ability that our freedom consists. For this purpose our reason is amply sufficient, and with this use of it as ministrant to action the majority of mankind are content. But when we use our reason speculatively or theoretically, to acquire knowledge for its own sake, knowledge pure and simple, the various limitations that we have been considering hinder and hamper us at once. For the desire for theoretic knowledge is a desire for complete knowledge; it cannot be satisfied with anything short of completeness; and though the effort to complete our knowledge is a continual spur to progress, it brings us no nearer to ultimate satisfaction. For abstraction,

as we have seen, is the condition of exactness, and every fresh abstraction is a step further from actuality ; while as knowledge advances it becomes increasingly specialized, discriminated into an infinitude of sections and subsections, each of which absorbs the attention of its particular student. Thus we are obliged not only to make abstraction of our subject-matter, but abstraction of our scientific thinker, by making him a specialist. And no specialist, however able, can ever adequately grasp the various relations of his own speciality to those of the countless other specialists around him. Each must pursue his special study in necessary abstraction from the rest. Hence, while the actual sum of our knowledge increases, its prospect of completeness grows more remote. Thus even in the case of science the practical is more successful than the speculative reason. For we can discover enough of the laws of phenomena or their methods of behaviour to use them for our purposes and control them at our will ; thus extending our practical power in every direction. But we cannot discover what or why these phenomena ultimately are ; ‘what is life?’ ‘what is consciousness?’ ‘what is electricity?’ We can describe but not explain these things, and explanation is what the speculative intellect demands. This must not, however, be taken as implying that, because speculative satisfaction is unattainable, the

desire for it is therefore a mistake. For it is the regulative ideal which makes knowledge possible. If we pursued knowledge with exclusive reference to its practical utility we should only be hampering our pursuit of it with an additional bias, peculiarly fatal to the attainment of truth. It is only the desire for knowledge, independently of all results, knowledge for its own sake and not for the sake of what may come of it, that makes intellectual progress possible; and this desire is stimulated by the conviction that all things can be known; that speculative satisfaction is ultimately possible. And this is what we mean by a regulative ideal; an ideal which under present conditions can never be realized, but whose existence inevitably attracts us to continuous efforts for its realization, and thus regulates our intellectual life.

Briefly to resume: man is primarily and essentially an active agent, and as such his dominant feature is his will, his capacity for resolving, realizing his resolutions in action, and thereby fashioning his character, or determining himself. Feeling and reason are both involved in this activity of will—the one as its stimulus, the other as its guide; but it is the will that finally determines what ideas and feelings shall be realized and thereby incorporated in the self; and to this extent reason and feeling viewed in relation to the part they play in the development of human personality are subordinate to will.

Consequently when a man turns his activity into the intellectual region, he cannot cease to be an active agent. He brings his common categories as a man and his peculiar categories as a particular man to bear upon the world of thought. He interferes in and interprets that world for himself, his entire character and antecedents contributing to colour the result. To obviate the difficulty arising from this personal equation, as well as from the complexity of the field of knowledge, we can separate, as far as possible, ourselves from all other interests, and the object of our inquiry from all other objects, and thus obtain accurate but abstract knowledge; knowledge not of things as they are in the living context of the universe, but as they are under the artificial conditions which by this double process of abstraction we have created.

On the other hand, if our desire is to understand things as they actually are, in their organic connexion with the living process of the universe, we must view them, as far as possible, in their concrete context, the totality of all their relations. But such knowledge from the nature of the case can never be exact or exhaustive, and must always be affected, moreover, by the peculiarities of its individual possessor; though these may vary indefinitely from the intuitive insight of the genius to the bias of the bigoted partisan.

## CHAPTER V

### THE INFLUENCE OF PRESUPPOSITIONS ON CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

WE will now return to the question of the reasonableness of Christianity. We have seen that in previous ages Christianity, as represented by its leading thinkers, has fearlessly appealed to reason; always answering its intellectual opponents in terms adequate to the philosophic situation of the day. But philosophic situations change, and the forms therefore of these answers become obsolete. And as Christianity must always provoke attack, in proportion to the vitality that it displays, it was natural that in an age of intellectual ferment, and also of religious revival, like the nineteenth century, the conflict, as it is so often miscalled, between science and religion should again become acute. This conflict has passed through various phases in the course of the century; nor has it always been conducted on either side with that absence of passion which is to be desired. But in this respect at least there has been an improvement towards the close of the century; while in many quarters there are indications of



diminished antagonism between the two points of view. On the one side theologians have learned under adverse criticism to clear their position from many unnecessary and untenable assumptions; and on the other, the compatibility, to say the least, of physical science with a spiritual philosophy, has come to be more widely recognized than it was a generation ago. Meanwhile we have been led to see more clearly than heretofore the distinction between scientifically established facts and the various theories which may be unscientifically deduced from them. It is of course an axiom of theology, though sometimes forgotten, that no fact of any kind, if it is a fact, can come in conflict with the truth of religion; and though a man of science may disbelieve theology, a theologian cannot consistently with his own first principles disbelieve science: since one of those principles is that God made and sustains the world, and that every freshly discovered fact in the world, therefore, is a fresh manifestation of God's working, a fresh truth about God. Hence the theologian is bound to regard all properly authenticated discoveries of science, as increasing his knowledge of God, and to accept them, not in the spirit of concession to an enemy, but of welcome to a friend. For theology, the study of the knowledge of God, must be, *vi termini*, the study of all truth; and every new truth that is made known

therefore should have as much interest for the theologian as for its own discoverer; it is a kind of treasure-trove upon his manor. But scientific truth of this kind is quite distinct from the idiosyncratic theories which individual thinkers may deduce from it. This may be illustrated from what happened when the process of natural selection was first brought before the world. The operation of natural selection by the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence has been scientifically established by a wide induction, and is now a recognized fact in biology. It has been accepted therefore by theologians as a contribution to our knowledge of the divine method in creation. But when this principle was first discovered, it was thought by a few of its extreme advocates to have destroyed teleology, the evidence of purpose or design in the world, one of the strongest popular proofs of Theism. Subsequent reflection has shown this not to be the case, even in the region of biology. But had it been otherwise, it is obvious that no biological discovery could affect the evidence of design outside the region of biology, in physics, for instance, on the one side of it, or in history or ethics or aesthetics on the other. Thus it was not the scientific facts in question, but an entirely and obviously illegitimate use of the facts, an illogical deduction from the facts, which came in imaginary conflict with theology; while, as

a matter of fact, our new views of biology have turned out in the end to involve a more far-reaching and profound teleology than those which they have supplanted. And this is what has always happened; it has never been, it never can be science, but only the misuse of science, that is antagonistic to religion. But in the process of the sifting controversy that has led us to recognize this distinction, we have also come to see that a similar line must be drawn in theology, between what we believe to be revealed truth, and the many mistaken inferences that men have drawn from it, as well as the many popular accretions by which in the course of ages it has been overlaid. The rejection of the Copernican astronomy by contemporary theologians is the most familiar illustration of one class of these false inferences, those namely which have arisen from assuming the Bible to be an authority on matters of science. But despite of the notoriety of the lesson, it was possible for theologians, in the middle of the nineteenth century, to make precisely the same mistake, in the case of geology; while it is only in quite recent years that they have generally come to understand that what applies to physical science may also apply to history; and that there also the biblical writer need not, of necessity, be an infallible authority. Then, again, there are the various theories and inferences that particular sects

and parties have incorporated with Christianity, till, in process of time, the two have become fused and confused in the popular mind. Some of the peculiar tenets of Calvinism, for instance, have been attacked in recent years, on the supposition that they might be taken as fairly representing the Christian faith, instead of being its caricature. And other instances of the same thing might be drawn from other quarters. It is often of course very difficult, in particular cases, to distinguish Christian truth, in this way, from erroneous or obsolete modes of its presentation: but the universal recognition that such a distinction exists, and must always be allowed for, is an immense gain to controversial clearness; and this is a thing of comparatively recent date. And if the progress of science is viewed by the theologian as part of the divine guidance of the human mind, its incidental criticism and correction of theological errors must be regarded as equally providential.

So far then our controversies have issued in increased clearness of thought. We have learned to separate both the facts of science and the doctrines of Christianity from the illegitimate inferences that are always liable to be drawn from them; and to see that the supposed antagonism between the two is always really due to the presence of these illegitimate inferences, on one side or the other.

We will now turn to the central doctrine of Christianity, the belief that Jesus Christ was God incarnate ; not with a view to repeating the evidence for it, which has been so long before the world, but simply to see what the Christian attitude towards that evidence is ; how the Christian approaches it, and why he considers it as cogent, in the light of modern thought, as in bygone ages—the logic, in short, of the Christian position. The evidence of course is complex, cumulative, convergent ; but an important factor in it is the Gospel history, and we will begin by isolating that. It is not an uncommon opinion that the Christian reads the Gospel history in the light of various assumptions, while his critical opponent puts such assumptions aside and confines himself to the bare facts of the case. But it will be obvious after what we have been saying that this is untrue. For it is impossible to approach any complex problem without presuppositions ; and doubly so a problem that not only involves physical, moral, and spiritual elements all combined, but is also of supreme personal interest, of one kind or another, to all who approach it, and touches human nature to the quick. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the controversies waged over the Gospel history are entirely concerned with the presuppositions of the respective combatants. The Gospels considered as documents that have come down to

us are the same facts for all alike. It is over their interpretation that issue is joined, and this interpretation is determined by our presuppositions.

To make this clear we will consider first the attitude of a Christian and then of an anti-Christian critic in approaching any of the questions which the Gospels raise. To know a thing is, as we have seen, to bring it into relation with ourselves, with what we already know, with the present content of our own minds. And what is this content in the case of a Christian? To begin with, he believes in a God who holds personal intercourse with men, and communicates to them moral and spiritual power. He has tested the reality of this intercourse and power in his own case till it has become a fact of experience to him—a spiritual fact. This gives him insight to recognize the signs of the same experience in other persons around him; some of whom, he sees, possess it in a far intenser degree than himself. He is sure therefore that intercourse with God is a fact of present experience. The consideration that he was first taught this, as a child, upon the authority of others, strengthens rather than weakens his conviction; because it means, as he now knows, that in every age men have realized this same experience to the extent of being ready to make any sacrifice to hand on its tradition to their fellow men. He is thus convinced that intimate inter-

course between God and man is a fact of spiritual experience, established by an immense and varied induction ; a fact of experience which takes place in our inmost being, and in which all our faculties of feeling, intellect, and will concur, a thing therefore of which we are more personally certain than of any of the facts of sense. This intercourse, moreover, implies mutual desire ; for the intensity of the desire on the human side is obvious. Θεῶν χατέουσ' ἄνθρωποι, 'My soul is athirst for God,' 'We are restless till we rest in thee,' are among its well-known expressions. And the creation of a being with such desires necessitates the conviction of a corresponding desire in his Creator. God therefore must desire to communicate Himself to men, at least to the degree in which man desires Him, and that degree is limitless. The man, moreover, who believes this must take a correspondingly high view of human nature—as *capax deitatis* capable of receiving God—and consequently of man's potential dignity and worth. Further, the Christian knows, by present experience and past history, that the Christian religion has satisfied and ennobled this great human craving in an unique degree, educing from it a spirituality of character and elevation of conduct to which all the true progress of the world is due. These convictions then are a part of the present content of a Christian's mind ; and, as such, presuppositions which

he brings with him to the study of the past. He does not regard them as prejudices, likely to interfere with his impartiality, but as truths, of which he is so certain that they have become a part of his very self, conditions of his insight, forms of his thought. So far indeed is he from any ability or desire to discount their influence, that he is absolutely compelled to regard a mind which does not possess these presuppositions as seriously disqualified for a critical study of religion.

Now these presuppositions do not of themselves necessitate belief in the Incarnation; but they predispose towards it; they profoundly harmonize with it; they render its occurrence probable; since an Incarnation is obviously the most complete form of divine self-manifestation that we can conceive, and thus satisfies both the human craving, and the expectation founded on that craving for intercourse with God; while it accounts for the unique power of Christianity which, whether due to the fact of it or not, has, beyond any controversy, been due to the belief in it. Consequently the Christian finds that his belief in the Incarnation tallies with some of the most absolutely certain facts of his personal experience—facts, moreover, which he knows to be typical of countless similar experiences in other persons, swelling till they represent an immense volume of common human thought and feeling. Hence his present belief in



the Incarnation is not founded on the authority of a mere tradition, but of a tradition which approves itself to his reason, reflecting on the spiritual experience of mankind—an experience too vast, too various, too subtle, too complex, too heartfelt, too tender, too intense ever to admit of being expressed in any words that tongue could frame. Hence a Christian's present belief in the Incarnation does not rest upon the Gospels alone, but on the congruity of the great Christian tradition with the innermost convictions of mankind. Consequently he will approach the critical study of the Gospels, already convinced of the Incarnation, on other grounds than the Gospels, strictly speaking, supply. Not of course that the Gospels are really separate in a Christian mind from the remainder of its religious content; they are part and parcel of his whole Christian consciousness in which every element illustrates and reinforces the others, and to say that he approaches the study of them with presuppositions is only another way of saying that he cannot isolate them from what is, for him, their actual concrete context. It follows that in the first place he will give great weight to the traditional interpretation of them, because this is part of the great living tradition with which he is now in present contact, and of whose truth he is, as we have seen, experimentally so sure. In the second place he will find no difficulty in

the miraculous element which they contain ; since the Incarnation, once believed, must carry with it at least the possibility of these attendant miracles ; while it involves a subordination of the material to the spiritual world which would make them, to many minds, antecedently probable. And in the third place he will not regard the variations and inconsistencies which the Gospels present as in any way affecting their value, since their true value is their result ; they have proved their vitality by sustaining the highest religious life of the world for nineteen centuries ; and this stupendous fact of experience cannot be affected by the inevitable and inevitably insoluble obscurities which naturally attach to documents written nineteen centuries ago. That is to say, the Christian critic consciously approaches the Gospels with presuppositions which necessarily qualify his entire view of their interpretation, and of every detail in every problem to which their interpretation gives rise.

But the same is the case, and must be the case, with every other kind of critic. For, as we have already seen, however anxious a man may be to get at the 'bare facts' of past history, he can only understand them by bringing them into relation with his own mind ; and this is not an empty mind, but a mind already furnished, with personal categories and a content of its own, and disposed, therefore, to look at things in a particular way.

He must of necessity, therefore, read this mental character into any new facts that are brought before him, estimate them by its canons, appropriate, assimilate them; turning them round, as it were, till he can see them in the light of his own habitual modes of thought. One man, for instance, rejects miracles as conflicting with the order of nature. This means that he has already made up his mind on the independence of the material from the spiritual order, and on the adequacy of our knowledge of the former; that his mind has emerged from the controversial discussion of these questions with a particular bent or bias, a presupposition which makes miracles antecedently incredible. But in this state of mind he can no more get at the bare facts of the past than could the Christian; what he does get at are facts in connexion with the context of his own present convictions; and as the miracles in question, if regarded as miracles, would be incongruous with these convictions, he finds it necessary to explain them away. But the real gist of his criticism does not lie in the ingenuity of this explanation, but in the philosophical presupposition which made the explanation necessary. Other critics reject miracles from a somewhat different point of view, as inconsistent with the dignity of God, or as implying an undue estimate of man's importance in the universe. And here it is equally obvious that they have in their minds

a particular conception of God and man, which they bring with them to the study of the facts in question; in other words, a set of philosophical presuppositions which determine the view that they must take of those facts. And this rejection of the miraculous becomes in turn a fresh presupposition, which further qualifies their judgement of the mental capacity, and consequent authority, of the Evangelists. Others, again, reject the Incarnation on the metaphysical ground that an Infinite Being cannot possibly be manifested in any individual finite form. And this on the face of it is an *a priori* presupposition, and one which must modify the entire interpretation of the Gospels. Meanwhile there is latent in all these positions a further presupposition which is less obvious, and therefore more easily escapes notice, namely, the assumption that the Gospels can be studied with a view to correct interpretation apart from their context, or in other words in the abstract. Whereas we have seen above that to discover concrete truth, truth of actual fact, we must regard things in their context. And the context of the Gospels is nothing less than the whole Christian religion, so that we cannot ask simply are these miracles likely to have happened, but, considering their intimate relation to the subsequent history of the world, are they likely to have happened. For, as Aristotle says, the true nature of a thing is what it has become when the

process of its development is complete. Here then is not only a presupposition, but a demonstrably fallacious one, an illogical assumption that vitiates the entire argument which it precedes. And in this way negative presuppositions may be quite as influential as those that are positive; the tacit omission, that is, of elements which are essential ingredients of the problem under discussion. What we have here been saying of the Gospels in general is doubly applicable to the problem of the Fourth Gospel, every detail of whose discussion is really determined by our initial point of view, whether, that is, we approach it with a preliminary belief or disbelief in the Incarnation, since what seem manifest improbabilities in the latter case, become perfectly probable in the former, so that the whole case for or against the authenticity of the Gospel turns not on the evidence of its history and content, taken really by themselves, but on the complexion which our presuppositions give to that evidence. Other instances might be quoted, but these will suffice to illustrate our point, which indeed should be obvious when once indicated. But, as a matter of fact, we find that it is very far from being obvious to many minds, for the simple reason that they are still hampered by the obsolete philosophy of Locke. That is to say, they still imagine that facts or objects are definite and clear-cut things, that impress themselves upon a blank mind, which

thereupon builds up its experience by adding these separate impressions together. Whereas we now recognize that our experience is a continuous whole, which the mind actively assists in creating, and that its difference in different individuals is due to the different attention which their character leads them to give to its various parts, or, to phrase it otherwise, to the different elements in the totality of possible experience in which they take interest, and which they consequently make objects of their attention. Thus we saw above that some minds concentrated their attention upon spiritual experience, and others upon the order of material nature, till these things became respectively the dominant factors in their general view of the world. When therefore we are invited—as we still often are invited—to look at the Gospels by themselves, with a view to see whether they justify their traditional interpretation, we must remember that this very proposal involves a presupposition, namely the presupposition of its own possibility, which sound philosophy denies: and we need only watch the process at work, to see that its issues are continuously determined by further presuppositions of one kind or another.

‘ Each states the law and fact and face of the thing  
Just as he’d have them, finds what he thinks fit,  
Is blind to what missuits him, just records  
What makes his case out, quite ignores the rest.’

The controversies that gather round the Gospels, then, are controversies between rival presuppositions ; and it is of great importance that this fact should be clearly apprehended, for its recognition removes at once much irrelevant argument from our discussions, and enables us to concentrate attention upon the real points at issue.

When we do this, we note that the controversies in question are concerned rather with old theories than with new facts ; theories with which Christianity has had to contend, and against which it has maintained itself for ages, rather than new discoveries, of which bygone Christians never dreamed. Modern discoveries have confessedly revolutionized our physical science, and with it our general view of the material world ; while modern criticism has considerably altered our opinions about the history and composition of various parts of the Bible. But it is obvious that neither of these things, by themselves, affect the reality of spiritual experience, or the intrinsic character of the Christian religion. They can only do this by being pressed into the service of some anti-Christian philosophy, materialism, agnosticism, pantheism, or whatever it may be. And all these anti-Christian philosophies are old and familiar as the hills ; they have been encountered and answered by Christian apologists, time out of mind. Their advocates have always appealed to

the latest discoveries in their behalf; but always to be met with the rejoinder that the discoveries admitted of two interpretations. And we need not be surprised when history once again repeats itself. Geology, archaeology, biology, psychology, have each in their turn, during the past century, been invested with an anti-Christian significance; but, when we come to examine them, the significance disappears: for it is seen to be due either to the maintenance by theologians of unwarrantable opinions, whose refutation has no effect upon religion, such as the scientific accuracy of Genesis, or the completeness of its chronology; matters which belong properly to the domain of science; or else to the adoption by scientific men of philosophical theories which, as we have just said, Christianity has answered to its own satisfaction long ago. Finally refuted, to the satisfaction of all men, these opinions have never been, nor perhaps ever will be; for they represent conceivable views of the universe which will always commend themselves to certain minds. But there is all the difference in the world between a wholly new attack upon the Christian position and the mere recrudescence of an old one; and it is with the latter process, not with the former, that the past century has really been concerned. Men imagine that 'modern thought' is particularly inimical to Christianity, simply because, for the most part,



they are only acquainted with modern thought. But there has always been such a 'modern thought,' even in the heart of the Middle Ages—as for example at the Sicilian Court of Frederick II—a fashionable preference for one or another of the possible alternatives to Christianity, that we have mentioned above; appealing to whatever might be the latest novelty in its support. And we overestimate the 'modern thought' of to-day, simply because, in our ignorance of history, we underestimate that of the past. It has always been a source of disquietude; always allured individuals from their allegiance; but it has never affected the integrity of the Christian life—that hidden life which has pursued its tenor as surely in every successive century as when first 'starving was their gain and martyrdom their price'; and still pursues it, as securely, as serenely, as successfully as ever, in countless secret corners of the earth, to-day.

Of course it is no refutation of an adverse theory to say simply that it is old; but there is a strong presumption that theories which have been opposed to Christianity for two thousand years, and yet have never consistently gained ground against it, will not be more successful in the time to come. And this may be said of all alternative schemes of the universe with which we are acquainted.

And by saying that they have not consistently

gained ground against it, we mean, that they have never disturbed the conviction of the great body of Christian thinkers, in the superior and demonstrably superior rationality of their faith; that they have never prevented the progress of Christian life in the world; and that no one of them has ever yet attained the popularity or permanence of the Christianity which has outlived successive phases of them all. This may sound paradoxical, in face of all the noise that has been made under the name of new discoveries; but the paradox admits of practical demonstration. For whenever a new discovery is quoted as against the Christian position, careful analysis will always enable us to separate the element of fact in it, which is the real new discovery, from the imported element of theory, which is nothing of the kind; and to see that while the novel fact is at the utmost neutral in its significance, it is the imported theory which is at once anti-Christian and antique.

We have chosen the case of the Gospels to illustrate the influence of our presuppositions on our criticism; since the Gospels form an important section of the total evidence for the Incarnation, and one whose significance has figured largely in the anti-Christian controversies of recent years. But what is true of the Gospels is equally true of any other section of Christian evidence when

isolated for attack. *Mutatis mutandis* we may say of it, what we say of the Gospels, that they are part and parcel of an infinitely complex and concrete body of fact; and to learn the truth about them we must read them in their complete context, which is the Christian religion, all that it is, and all that it has done; or in other words, we must bring this context with us as a presupposition to their study; while those critics who in the name of impartiality decline to do this, are unconsciously all the time employing other and less appropriate presuppositions of their own—presuppositions which, in many cases, are already anti-Christian, and therefore necessitate anti-Christian conclusions—conclusions which, thus reached, are not really the results of modern thought, but only the present phase of the unending controversy between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the age.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RELATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO *PHILOSOPHY*

**I**T will be obvious, from the considerations urged in our last chapter, that all attacks upon Christianity are and must be really made not in the field of science, but in that of philosophy. For all science is abstract; to the extent at least of isolating its subject-matter from every alien context; and consequently no scientific fact, as long as it is being scientifically treated, can ever come in contact with religion. But with philosophy it is otherwise. For the aim of philosophy is concrete knowledge of the world as a whole. It surveys all the different departments of experience, physical, psychological, social, aesthetic, ethical, religious; with a view to ascertaining their mutual relations and total significance; what is the nature of their connexion; what is their meaning as a whole. And directly we ask this question we are confronted by the problem of the relation between spirit and matter. It is comparatively easy to trace the connexion between the different departments of our physical experience when taken

by themselves ; and in like manner between the different departments of our spiritual experience. But the essential question, if we are ever to understand the meaning of the world as a whole, is how are these two spheres or aspects of being related to each other. Is spirit but a passing phosphorescence on a sea of matter ? Or is matter ultimately a manifestation of spirit ? Or yet again, if the two are co-ordinate aspects of one and the self-same thing, how are their apparently contradictory attributes of necessity and freedom to be reconciled ? Is spirit less free, or matter freer, than we habitually think ? And as this is a question in which both science and religion are concerned, it is obvious that here, that is in the philosophic field, they must necessarily meet.

But this problem is, of course, as old as philosophy itself ; and faced the Greeks, when they were inaugurating the intellectual life of Europe, less oppressively perhaps, but quite as inevitably, as it faces ourselves to-day ; with the consequence that, as the Greek artists determined the typical forms of sculpture for all time, so the great Greek thinkers determined the types of philosophic theory.

Now the Greeks have never been surpassed, if ever equalled, in philosophical acumen. They had not the materials that we of later ages have at our command, the gathered experience of a maturer world. But they did all that pure thought could

do, with the materials which they possessed. And those materials, it must be remembered, included all the essentials of the philosophic problem. For they had enough knowledge of the physical world to have suggested the theory of its atomic structure ; together with considerable observation of the obvious aspects of plant and animal life ; while, on the other side, in aesthetics, ethics, history, politics, and natural theology, they were fully competent to contribute profoundly to the permanent thought of the world. They were thus familiar, if in a limited degree, yet with all the different kinds of phenomena which philosophy seeks to correlate ; and bringing to bear on them an unrivalled intellect, and an intense speculative interest, they determined the outlines within which all subsequent philosophy has moved. Hence, while the science of each generation supersedes that of the last, and is always new, there is no such thing as a really new philosophy—a new interpretation of the world as a whole. For philosophy always deals with the same problem that the Greeks discussed. Wider experience, new discoveries, maturer thought, the characteristic genius of new races, have thrown fresh light upon the conditions of this problem, and brought fresh aspects of it into prominence, but they do not alter its essential character, or the fundamental conceptions with which it is concerned.

Accordingly, if we look at the history of Greek philosophy, before the Christian era, we find in it representatives of all the different theories of the universe, with which we are familiar to-day. Materialism had been advocated by Democritus and others, with an ability which modern materialists have fully recognized. While the famous dictum of Protagoras that 'man is the measure of all things' summarized the sceptical conclusion, that because all our thought is relative to ourselves, we can have no certainty of its validity or truth: and the bearing of this upon religion would be equivalent to what we now call agnosticism—that God, if there be a God, cannot be known. It was against both these modes of thought that the philosophy of Plato was directed. He maintained that the world is not a chaos but a cosmos, a rational, intelligible order, and as such a manifestation of divine ideas, into relation with which the human mind is capable of entering; thus vindicating as against materialism the rationality of the world, and as against scepticism the validity of human thought. Aristotle critically reconstructed the Platonic idealism, speaking of the ideas as forms impressed upon matter or realized in matter, and having their first and final cause in God: while the Stoics spoke of the ideas more especially as immanent in the world, and called them the seminal reason or reasons (*λόγος, λόγοι*) of things, laying

great stress upon their teleological significance. This term reason (*λόγος*), which thus summed up the idealistic tradition in Greek philosophy, was further identified by Philo and others with the creative wisdom or Word of the Lord, which had been poetically personified in the later Jewish literature.

Thus the term 'Logos,' which means both reason and word, represented the meeting-point of Greek and Jewish thought, of metaphysics and religion; and as such was adopted by the author of the Fourth Gospel; and though this is significant in any case, it is much more significant if that author, as Christians have always believed, was St. John.

The Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel cannot, of course, be adequately discussed in a parenthesis; nor is its discussion needful for our present purpose, since the question has been amply treated by various writers within recent years. We will merely therefore pause to point out that, as was noticed in the preceding chapter, the whole problem turns upon our presuppositions, and is a crucial instance of their importance. To take a single illustration of this, there is the question of the date of the Gospel's appearance. Many of the indications of this date, as all who are familiar with the controversy will be aware, are of that subtle and delicate nature which is most



easily affected by the prepossessions of the inquirer. It will be obvious therefore that a critic who examined them, with the assumption already in his mind that the doctrine of the Gospel was a late development requiring length of time for its production, would be imperceptibly biased in his whole examination. And this was conspicuously the case with the Tübingen school, who in consequence proposed a date which no critic at the present day dreams to be tenable. And yet one might have anticipated that if any question could be free from subjective influence, it would be one of such an external and objective character as a date.

Now the Christian tradition is that the Fourth Gospel was written by the beloved disciple, at the end of a life-long meditation upon the words and deeds of One whom he had 'seen and handled' with the exceptional intimacy and insight of love; reading, as would be natural, something of himself—his own afterthoughts and reflections—into his description of the past; but that a self which for a long lifetime had been continuously moulded by the very Spirit of the Master whom he described—the Spirit of which that Master had expressly said, 'He shall take of Mine, and shall declare it unto you.'

'Since much that at the first, in deed and word,  
Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,

Had grown (or else my soul was grown to  
match,  
Fed through such years, familiar with such light,  
Guarded and guided, still to see and speak)  
Of new significance and fresh result ;  
What first were guessed as points, I now knew  
stars,  
And named them in the Gospel I have writ.'

And this tradition, while it cannot be critically refuted, is simpler, more natural, more congruous with all the facts, more psychologically probable than any alternative hypothesis—but only upon one presupposition, the presupposition, namely, that the Incarnation was a fact. If Jesus Christ was really God manifest in the flesh, who would be so likely to be the profoundest chronicler of the fact as His own most privileged disciple? And if we examine the Gospel with this antecedent probability in mind, we find nothing in it that is incompatible with, and much that favours, a Johannine authorship.

On the other hand, when we turn to the arguments by which that authorship is impugned, we find behind every one of them either a latent or an avowed presupposition that the Incarnation was not a fact ; but a later mythical glorification of a character which in itself was merely human, and of course on this assumption the probabilities are reversed. If Jesus Christ claimed to be divine, His most intimate human friend would

naturally be the fullest recorder of the fact. But if he made no such claim, His most intimate friend would be the last person in the world to make it for Him; or indeed to allow of its being made, while he still lived, without contradiction. Accordingly, by one or other of these two presuppositions the authorship of the Gospel is, in the last resort, determined. If what is supposed to be the mythical nature of its contents proves it to be a late production, the evidence can with sufficient ingenuity be construed in favour of such a conclusion; while on the other hand, if the historical nature of its contents is accepted, everything tallies, when sympathetically studied, with its having been written by St. John. But Christians believe the Incarnation to be a fact, for reasons whose general character we have described in the previous chapter; and this being the case they need have no hesitation in ascribing the Fourth Gospel to St. John, and accepting its contents as invested with the weight of his authority.

It is St. John then, in our common belief, who writing in an intellectual centre, with an intellectual purpose, adopts the word 'Logos' from current philosophy into Christian theology. At the same time he makes two new statements concerning this 'Logos.' Firstly that the divine reason or Word was what we call personal. 'The Word was with God,' or more literally 'face to face with,'

that is 'in close communion with' God, and 'the Word was God'; and, secondly, that the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst men in the historic personality of Jesus Christ. Thus the Incarnation, by being described in language which was the summary of past idealism, is here presented by St. John as the fulfilment of Greek speculation. It was to this, the existence of a personal Word of God, that the Platonic ideas, the Aristotelian forms, the seminal reason of the Stoics, the Philonian Logos had all pointed. This was the complete truth of which they were all partial adumbrations; and this Word had become man. Thus St. John's prologue has a twofold significance. Human reason contemplating the world had arrived at the conclusion that it was not chaotic but intelligible, and must therefore proceed from a rational first cause and towards a rational final cause. And by accepting this conclusion as the basis of his own further statements, St. John implicitly sanctions the process by which it had been reached. He justifies the action of reason in constructing a natural theology; he admits that it is a faculty which leads us to truth; while he further explains that this is not an 'unassisted' reason, but illuminated by the light that lighteth every man coming into the world, which is the divine reason itself. It is guided by God to recognize His presence in the world. And as

capable of such guidance and such recognition human reason must be akin to the divine. On the other hand, by connecting the Christian revelation in this way with the current drift of human thought, he assigns it a place in philosophy, as being the fulfilment of previous speculation. He implies that it is not only a guide of our life, but also an illumination of our intellect ; throwing fresh light upon the character of the divine reason, 'by whom all things were made,' and so leading us to a fuller understanding of the philosophic problem, the meaning of the world.

In saying this, we are not of course in any degree implying that St. John intended, like the Gnostics of the following century, to represent Christianity as a system of philosophy. His Christianity is identical with that of the other evangelists—a religion and not a philosophy. It brought men a new faith, a new hope, a new love, whereby to live. It was a practical appeal to the practice of men, and promised intellectual insight only as a result of moral conduct. But every religion implies a particular view of God's relation to the world, and has therefore a philosophy behind it. And in process of time this philosophy needs to be expressed ; for men think as well as act, and their action depends upon their thought, as well as their thought upon their action : and thoughtful men, in proportion as they are in earnest

with their religion, must ask themselves what general theory of the world it involves, what attitude towards contemporary thought it obliges them to take. And this was doubly necessary in the case of Christianity ; from the fact that it arose in a philosophic age, and had to be preached in philosophic centres. Educated society in the first centuries of the Christian era teemed with philosophy of various kinds, which with the more serious minds took the place of religion, as a guide of life. And it was necessary if Christianity was to appeal to the educated world, that it should define its relation to this philosophy.

Accordingly St. John presents Christianity—when the time for such a presentation comes—as containing a message for the intellect, as well as for the heart. The divine Reason or Word had become man—and suffering man—out of love for humanity, and in so doing had manifested God as essentially Love, and love as the final cause, or the ultimate reality of the universe.

God had revealed Himself in the region of experience, and had promised that His Spirit should instruct men, as they were able to bear it, in the fuller significance of that revelation, ‘I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth . . . for He shall take of Mine, and shall

declare it unto you.' And such a revelation at once extended the vista and limited the direction of human thought. It extended its vista, by exhibiting as actual fact, and in the region of actual fact, what could never otherwise have been more than a matter of speculative conjecture; and it limited its direction, by rendering it impossible for thought to go back from this fact, or continue to speculate as if it had not occurred. The Incarnation, once accepted, must obviously be the centre and the certainty round which subsequent philosophy should move. But this revelation did not merely consist in the statements of Jesus Christ about God. It consisted in Himself—His own personal life and character. The person was the revelation; the revelation was a person. Hence it could only be accepted in the way that we appreciate a person; not, that is by the abstract intellect, but by the effort of the total personality. Its apprehension, in other words, would be of that concrete nature that we have described above, in which every faculty and instinct plays a part, and in which the moral character is an important factor. And this kind of knowledge, as we have seen, does not admit of abstract demonstration. It must be acquired by every separate individual for himself, and varies in completeness with the insight of the individual. Thus however many probabilities might point to the conclusion that

Jesus Christ was God incarnate, the conversion of those probabilities into certainty would depend upon the individual character, the moral and spiritual presuppositions, of the particular person to whom they were addressed. All those, for example, who were colour-blind to goodness would be wholly out of reach of their appeal. Hence the philosophical situation is this: Christians who are convinced of the truth of the Incarnation consider themselves thereby possessed of a fact of experience, which, once known, must become for ever the central thought of their philosophy. And if it is a fact of experience, as for them it is, this position is absolutely justified. For philosophy, however idealistic, must draw all its materials from experience; and is bound, by its very nature, to take the whole range of experience into account. If then a new and transcendently important fact comes suddenly within that range, it would be hopelessly unphilosophical to ignore it. And so the Incarnation reorientated the philosophy of Christian thinkers; much as in later days the Copernican astronomy reorientated our views of the physical universe; and with equal legitimacy in either case. But at the same time this new piece of experience does not, as we have said, admit of demonstration: its acceptance as a fact is a matter of personal predisposition; and it can only of course have the force of a fact for those who so accept it.



Hence Christianity effected a cleavage in philosophy no less than in all other departments of life; a cleavage between the Christian and all other thinkers. For no Christian could hold his religion and his philosophy apart, since his religion involved facts which vitally affected his philosophy. And thenceforward, if he philosophized at all, he must be a Christian philosopher. He must view the universe in that new light which the Incarnation had cast upon its meaning. He must incorporate in his philosophy truth which the un-Christian thinker did not accept. This accordingly was what the great Greek fathers did. They recognized in Christianity the fulfilment of previous philosophic aspiration, precisely as they recognized in it the fulfilment of prophecy. As the Messiah of Jewish expectations had appeared, so the Logos of Greek philosophy had become Incarnate. And in virtue of this fact the Christian thinkers claimed to be the true philosophers, the true continuators of the great intellectual tradition of the past.

And it was a claim indeed for which the thought of the world was ripe. For a great change had come over philosophy, by the Christian era; the buoyant confidence of the earlier philosophers in the sufficiency of human reason had considerably abated, and thinkers of all schools had come to recognize in the limited nature of our experience an inevitable limitation of our thought; with the

corollary that if fuller truth was to be attainable at all it must be through revelation. Hence the notion of revelation was in the air ; it was discussed by philosophers, and viewed by many as a thing in no way antecedently improbable. Naturally, therefore, the Christian thinkers who had themselves been students of philosophy were ready to recognize in the Incarnation the fulfilment of those intellectual hopes. In so doing, the men who saw likenesses—philosophic minds like Clement and Origen—would naturally emphasize their continuity with the past ; while those who saw differences—practical moralists like Tatian or Tertullian—would rather lay stress upon their distinction from it. The former would tend to regard Christian theology as fulfilling, the latter as superseding Greek philosophy ; the complete truth being of course that it did both these things ; it superseded by fulfilling, and in fulfilling it superseded the aspirations of previous speculation. It covered the ground of philosophy and involved an answer to the cardinal questions of philosophy, such as the personality of God, the freedom of the will, the destiny of matter to become the manifestation of spirit. These were fixed points on which the Christian could no longer philosophize, in the sense that he could no longer speculate upon them as open questions ; and to that extent philosophy was superseded. But on the other

hand, they were fixed points in the intellectual region; they threw fresh light upon the problem of philosophy—the meaning of the universe—and left the intellect as free as ever to apply these lights; and from this point of view might be regarded as advancing rather than superseding philosophy.

To resume then: Christianity did not primarily appeal to the intellect, but to the entire personality of man, yet in so doing it of necessity included the intellect, and introduced into the intellectual region a similar change to that which it accomplished in the moral and spiritual life. It gave men knowledge of a kind which they had been seeking, but could not otherwise have attained, and it gave it in the form of a fact of experience—the self-revelation of Jesus Christ. Thinkers who recognized this fact as a fact might and did continue to call themselves philosophers; but they philosophized ‘with a difference,’ that is round a nucleus of revealed truth—which thenceforth separated them from extra-Christian thinkers, and might more accurately therefore be called theologians. Christian Theology, in other words, meant philosophy become Christian. It was Christianity claiming the intellectual region, as it claimed all others, for its own; and claiming it ‘not to destroy, but to fulfil.’ Hence the early theologians are characterized by an intellectual

enthusiasm, an exuberance, a joy, that is in striking contrast to the weary tone of their extra-Christian contemporaries. For the Incarnation had brought assurance that their intellectual longings were not doomed to disappointment. The world was after all a rational world, as the greatest philosophers had said; and human reason nothing less than the created image of the Divine—the Divine which had now become human to make humanity divine, and satisfy the cravings of the intellect, no less than the yearnings of the heart and the efforts of the will.

The intellectual position of early Christianity may therefore be analysed as follows:—

First, that the Incarnation was a fact of experience; experience which consisted in the claim which Jesus Christ made for Himself, interpreted in the light of His character and conduct, and vindicated by His resurrection from the dead. And this is expressly maintained with the most elaborate emphasis, at an earlier date than that of any of our present Gospels, by St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians.

Secondly, that this experience was not of a nature to compel universal assent as an abstract demonstration might do, for it consisted in the correct appreciation of a person, and that a divine person; and must not only involve, therefore, all those predispositions which, as we have seen above, the

appreciation of a person implies; but involve them in a wholly exceptional degree—a faith or spirituality of mind, which is itself, according to St. Paul and St. John, due to the assistance of divine illumination.

Thirdly, that though an experience of this exceptional nature does not afford common ground for meeting critical opponents, since it cannot be quoted as fact to those who do not accept it as fact; yet those who do so accept it must inevitably utilize it, as they would any other fact of experience which might throw important light upon the problems of thought.

Fourthly, that this fact, when thus intellectually regarded, contained an answer to the most fundamental questions which philosophy had raised; an answer which, while it supplemented, yet confirmed the general truth of Greek idealism, as being a movement in a right direction, an approximation to the truth of things; an answer which by implication therefore affirmed the capacity of the human mind to attain truth, and by consequence its ultimate kinship with the divine; which kinship was at once the prophecy and the presupposition of the Incarnation.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PATRISTIC VIEW OF CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE

NO reader of the Fathers, and more especially of the Greek Fathers, can fail to be struck by their intense interest in that philosophical aspect of their religion to which we have alluded above ; the way in which they love to dwell upon the ~~cosmical~~ significance of the Incarnation ; its relation to the whole universe, material as well as spiritual ; its value for thought no less than for life. All the more marked therefore is the fact that they never treat it as a mere philosophy, or deduction of reason. From first to last it remains a revelation, through the historic personality of Jesus Christ. And this is an important point to notice, on account of the way in which patristic theology is often misrepresented as being a philosophical corruption of the primitive Gospel. Nothing could be more untrue to history, as may be seen by comparing the accepted views of the early Church with the various rejected opinions which came in consequence to be called heretical. The heresies were almost always attempts at explanation ; endeavours to rationalize Christian doctrine, involving

the elimination from it of any element that could not be rationalized ; while the successive answers to them were really only reassertions of the fact of the Incarnation—that God had really become man—a fact which, however reasonable, could obviously never be comprehended by the reason. Gnosticism for example in all its forms, fantastic though they may seem to us, was an attempt to reduce Christianity to a philosophy of one kind or another ; in which Christian terms were retained, but employed to designate conceptions that were entirely *a priori* creations of the human intellect or imagination. It was not the inclusion of philosophy in Christianity, but the accommodation of Christianity to a philosophy whose speculative requirements it was altered to fit. Or again, Sabellianism was simply an attempt to make the doctrine of the Trinity intelligible ; to bring it within the compass of obvious human analogies ; to explain it in fact by explaining it away. And Arianism was a similar attempt upon the doctrine of the Incarnation ; an effort to introduce what to the intellect of the age seemed a more intelligible view of the Incarnation ; a view that could more readily be understood. And the same might easily be shown to be the case with the various other leading heresies of the day. The orthodox procedure, on the other hand, was not to explain but to reassert—to reassert the original belief of the

Christian Church—in the fact of the Incarnation, and in the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity as revealed through the Incarnation. This process would inevitably from time to time involve the use of new terminology; which, to a superficial view, might seem to imply the introduction of new thought. But it may easily be seen that this was not really the case. Take, for example, the term ‘consubstantial,’ round which so much controversy raged. This was confessedly a new term, and was for that reason suspected by the orthodox conservatives of the age. But what did its employment really mean? Simply a reassertion of the Incarnation in terms of the particular philosophy by which it had been denied; ‘Jesus Christ was really God Incarnate.’ That was the primitive belief; and the introduction of the term ‘consubstantial’ was distinctly regarded by its advocates not as an attempt to make any addition to that belief, but simply to define, as against current misconceptions, what that belief had always implicitly contained. ‘Jesus Christ has always been believed by Christians’—so one might paraphrase the Athanasian argument—‘to be God in the fullest sense of the term. And consequently whatever phraseology may have come at any particular time to imply God, in the fullest sense of the term, that phraseology must be applied to Jesus Christ.’ In saying this we are guilty of no special pleading,



we are simply looking beneath the language at the facts. The language was new; but the object of its employment was not novelty but conservatism; to reassert the reality of the Incarnation.

Or to take another case—in which the doctrine, finally declared to be orthodox, might seem still more open to the charge of novel dogmatism—what was the real significance of the Monophysite controversy—the controversy as to whether there were one or two natures in Christ? Those who argued for one nature might easily appear at first sight to be in the right; for it would seem the more common sense, the less self-contradictory, the more intelligent view; in short, it was an attempt at an explanation. But this inevitably led to the dilemma that this one nature must either be human, or divine, or such a mixture of the two as to be distinctively neither; and in any of those three cases the reality of the Incarnation—that Jesus Christ was really God and really man—disappeared. On the other hand, the maintenance of the two natures was no attempt at an explanation; it did not render the mode of the Incarnation more intelligible; it merely reasserted the fact in fresh phraseology—that to be really God and really man must mean to have the nature of God and the nature of man, or in other words, two natures. So far indeed are the dogmatic definitions of the early Church—on the doctrine of the

Trinity and the Incarnation—from in any way ‘adding to the faith,’ that they might almost be fairly described as negative rather than positive in their intention; positive of course in continually reasserting the two doctrines in question, but negative in their emphatic rejection of all rationalizing explanations of them. Thus it is only by being isolated from its historic context that Christian theology can be made to appear unduly speculative; whereas in its context of contemporary speculation it is at once seen to be a refusal to speculate—a refusal to substitute rational deduction for the acceptance of revelation as revelation. The essence of the Christian position was that the life and teaching of Jesus Christ had revealed to the intellect as well as to the heart what neither the heart nor the intellect could have discovered by themselves; but which when once revealed they could recognize as self-evidently true. And the object of dogma was simply to guard the revelation as a fact; precisely as any scientific fact when once established is dogmatically taught. Of course the principle of dogmatic teaching may be easily abused in unlearned hands, and was in subsequent ages abused by illegitimate extension beyond its province. But this was not the case with the Fathers of dogmatic theology; who were often reluctant to dogmatize at all; and always acutely conscious of their intellectual limitations.

Origen, for example, who may be called the founder of systematic theology, is chiefly known to many for the boldness of his philosophical speculations, and the subsequent controversies to which they gave rise. But he opens his treatise on 'First Principles' as follows :—

'We ceased to seek for truth (notwithstanding the profession of many Greeks and others to make it known) among those who claimed it for erroneous opinions, when once we had come to believe that Christ was the Son of God, and were convinced that we must learn it from Himself. At the same time there are many who think they hold the doctrines of Christ, and yet differ from those who have gone before them. We must remember therefore that, as the doctrine of the Church has been transmitted in regular succession from the Apostles, and is still preserved, that only is to be accepted as truth which in no way diverges from ecclesiastical and apostolical traditions<sup>1</sup>.'

The name of Athanasius, again, has become almost a byword for the intrepid handling of divine mysteries. Yet he writes as follows :—

'Nor must we ask why the word of God is not such as our word, considering God is not such as we, as has been before said ; nor again is it

<sup>1</sup> Orig. *de Prin.* i. 2.

right to seek how the word is from God, or how He is God's radiance, or how God begets, and what is the manner of His begetting. For a man must be beside himself to venture on such points; since a thing ineffable and proper to God's nature, and known to Him alone and to the Son, this he demands to be explained in words. It is all one as if they sought where God is, and how God is, and of what nature the Father is. But as to ask such questions is irreligious, and argues an ignorance of God, so it is not holy to venture such questions concerning the generation of the Son of God, nor to measure God and His wisdom by our own nature and infirmity. Nor is a person at liberty on that account to swerve in his thoughts from the truth, nor, if any one is perplexed in such inquiries, ought he to disbelieve what is written<sup>1</sup>.

While Augustine, perhaps the greatest of all dogmatic theologians, gives us the following warning against undue dogmatism :—

‘ It is a very shameful and dangerous thing, and one to be carefully avoided, that an unbeliever should hear a Christian talking nonsense, about the earth, the air, the motions, and magnitude, and distances of the stars; the courses of the seasons, the nature of animals and minerals, and suchlike scientific questions; on the pretended authority of

<sup>1</sup> Athan. *Contr. Ar.* ii. 36.

Scripture. For if his hearer has a real knowledge of these things, grounded on observation and reasoning, he cannot refrain from laughing at the abysmal ignorance of the Christian<sup>1</sup>.

Nor does St. Hilary of Poitiers, in the following passage, speak only for himself. He expresses the general, if not the universal temper of the patristic theologians, when compelled to dogmatize:—

‘We are driven, alas, by the faults of our heretical opponents to do things unlawful, to scale heights inaccessible, to speak out what is unspeakable, to presume where we ought not. And whereas it is by faith alone that we should worship the Father, and reverence the Son, and be filled with the Spirit, we are now obliged to strain our weak human language in the utterance of things beyond its scope; forced into this evil procedure of our foes. Hence, what should be matter of silent religious meditation must now needs be imperilled by exposure in words<sup>2</sup>.’

\*Such then was Christian dogma in the view of the greatest of those who moulded it. It was not intended to limit the freedom of reason to probe everything that falls within the scope of reason. Nor, on the other hand, was it intended to explain to reason things which reason could not otherwise have understood. It explained nothing; it simply

<sup>1</sup> *De Gen. ad Lit.* i. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *De Trin.* ii. 2, 4.

aimed at giving the most accurate expression attainable of certain facts, whose character as facts rested on the authoritative statements of Jesus Christ; and it treated these facts as mysteries—not in the sense of contradictions to reason, but in the sense of things with which reason is at present incompetent to deal; things which, if they were to be known at all, therefore, could only be known by revelation, and must be accepted with that implicit obedience which a revelation obviously demands. In fact, if we grant a revelation, dogma inevitably follows, and to object to dogma is to deny revelation, for dogma is only the authorized statement of the content of revelation, and as such to be distinguished from all subsequent inferences or speculations to which the subject-matter of dogma might give rise—a distinction which Origen is careful to draw;—

‘It ought to be known that the holy Apostles in preaching the Christian faith delivered themselves with the utmost clearness on certain points, which they believed to be necessary for all, however dull of spiritual apprehension; while they left the grounds of their statements to be examined by those who should merit the excellent gifts of the Spirit, and by His means acquire the gifts of learning, and wisdom, and knowledge. But on other points they merely stated the fact that things were so, passing over in silence the manner

or origin of their existence ; plainly in order that the more zealous of their successors, who should be lovers of wisdom, might have a field of exercise for their talents ; such, that is, as should duly qualify themselves to be fit and proper recipients of wisdom <sup>1</sup>.

And this is the view of all the more philosophically minded of the Fathers. They did not regard dogma as limiting their freedom to philosophize, or themselves as less true philosophers for being dogmatic upon points which reason could not have reached ; but on the contrary, as possessing in their dogmas fresh assistance towards a true philosophy.

Now, as the dogmatic definitions of the Fathers have determined the form of subsequent Christian belief, and are often, as we have seen, adversely and sometimes ignorantly criticized in the present day, it will be well to endeavour to see what their intellectual position actually was, and how far it accords with our own.

\* And first we must always bear in mind that reluctance to dogmatize to which St. Hilary, as we have seen, gives such strong expression. This reluctance is in striking contrast to the over-dogmatic temper of many subsequent ages ; but with the Fathers it was intensely real, as may be seen not only from the frequency with which they

<sup>1</sup> Orig. *de Prin.* i. 1.

give expression to it in their writings, but from the whole line on which the theological movement of the early centuries was conducted. And the effect of this reluctance was to minimize dogmatic definition by limiting it to those points which seemed absolutely essential, and these were primarily the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity. To many of us who view these definitions through the mist of ages, and for the most part without a knowledge of their historical context, they may not unnaturally seem over-precise. But seen in their true context it is otherwise. For they emerge from a sea of controversy in which waves of wild speculation, of fanciful and arbitrary conjecture, of fanatical partisanship and superstitious credulity, were perpetually threatening to overwhelm the simplicity of the Christian creed. And they emerge from this complex background as quite obviously straightforward efforts to preserve the integrity of what Christians had always believed. Christianity had to be handed on from age to age by teaching, and must inevitably be clothed in language in order to be taught; and the object of the language chosen was as we have seen conservative, even in its apparent innovations; it did not seek to explain or add anything to the truths which it expressed, but simply to prevent their being explained away. The object in view was not to develop a theory, but to preserve the



record of a fact. And no impartial critic can deny that this, the Fathers' own estimate of their action, was substantially correct. Tradition was their watchword; they bore witness to what, in their belief, had always been taught, and to what certainly had been taught in all its essential features, since the days of St. Paul and of St. John. Thus dogma belongs rather to the domain of history than of philosophy; it is epitomized or condensed history rather than stereotyped philosophy; the accredited record of fact.

The presupposition then of dogmatic theology is that the Incarnation was a fact of experience; that Jesus Christ was recognizably God Incarnate, and His teaching about God therefore divinely true.

On what grounds did the Fathers believe this fact? First, in the order of thought, on the ground of the miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On this point they are emphatic; they believed the Gospel miracles, and, above all, the resurrection to attest the superhuman character of Christ and command attention to His claims. And in so doing they are very far from being naïvely uncritical. They have none of the ignorant credulity that was so common at a later date. They sift and criticize the accounts of miracles, but only to accept those which they consider true; none more

unreservedly than the master-minds of Origen, Athanasius, and Augustine.

‘Christians,’ says Origen, ‘appear at first to have been more induced by miracles than by exhortations to forsake the institutions of their fathers, and to adopt others which were quite strange to them. And indeed, if we were to reason from what is probable as to the first formation of the Christian society, we should say that it is incredible that the apostles of Jesus Christ, who were unlettered men of humble life, could have been emboldened to preach Christian truth to men by anything else than the power which was conferred upon them, and the grace which accompanied their words and rendered them effective; and those who heard them would not have renounced the old-established usages of their fathers, and been induced to adopt notions so different from those in which they had been brought up, unless they had been moved by some extraordinary power and by the force of miraculous events<sup>1</sup>.’

‘From the works He did in the body,’ says Athanasius, ‘He made Himself known to be Son of God . . . for it may be known from His works that He who can do these is not man, but the Power and Word of God. . . . Who that saw Him healing the diseases to which the human race is

<sup>1</sup> Orig. *c. Cels.* VIII. xlvii.

subject can still think Him man and not God? . . . Who seeing the substance of water changed and transformed into wine, fails to perceive that He who did this is Lord and creator of the substance of all waters? . . . He went upon the sea also, as its master . . . to afford evidence . . . of His lordship over all things. And in feeding so vast a multitude on little . . . did He show Himself to be any other than the very Lord whose providence is over all things<sup>1</sup>?

And once more St. Gregory of Nyssa:—

‘If a person requires proofs of God’s having been manifested to us in the flesh, let him look at the divine activities. For of the existence of the Deity at all one can discover no other demonstration than that which the testimony of those activities supplies. . . . On the same principle, as regards the manifestation of God in the flesh, we have established a satisfactory proof of that apparition of Deity in those wonders of His operations; for in all His work as actually recorded we recognize the characteristics of the divine nature. . . . If every notion that is conceivable of God is to be traced in what is recorded of Him, what is there to hinder our faith<sup>2</sup>?’

But even stronger than their reliance on miracle

<sup>1</sup> Athan. *De In.* § 18.

<sup>2</sup> Greg. Nys. *Log. Cat.* c. xii.

is their appeal to prophecy. Jewish prophecy, they would have admitted, did not of itself prove that the Incarnation was coming; it was not explicit enough to have enabled men to invent the story of the Incarnation. But once confronted with the Incarnation, the whole of Jewish prophecy assumed a new significance. It gained a clearness and a completeness which it had not hitherto possessed. The Jews might still continue to ponder and dispute over its unsolved obscurities; but the Fathers felt that they and they alone possessed its key. The whole long record from Moses to Malachi, in the light of the Incarnation became luminous; and in becoming so brought home to them with irresistible conviction the certainty of its own providential guidance; since it had issued in a climax which no human vision, no spirit but that of God, could have foreseen. And this total impression of the prophetic literature must be distinguished from the detailed application of particular prophecies, if we would do justice to the intellectual attitude of the Fathers. For in this detailed application we find much which, though it might please the devout imagination of a confirmed Christian, could never have possessed weight as argument. Messianic allusions are recognized where they do not in any literal sense exist; forced and fanciful and arbitrary interpretations frequently occur; and far-fetched types of Christ

are discerned in such trivial things as the scarlet thread of Rahab, or the uplifting of Moses' hands. But all these things are separable from what Justin calls 'the everlasting voice of prophecy'; the emphasis of prophet after prophet on the reality of God's care for men; and the progressive assurance that the care must culminate in its own complete manifestation, however dimly the conditions of such a manifestation might be apprehended. This predictive tone and temper of the whole Jewish history and literature is clearly distinguishable from particular predictions. And though the Fathers never draw the distinction as plainly as it is drawn in the present day, one cannot read them without feeling that they are aware of it; it is in the background of their mind. They do not really rely so much even on those particular predictions which they consider the most striking, as on the congruity of the Incarnation with the prophetic history and teaching regarded as a whole; and the evidence which this congruity affords of a providential purpose throughout, from the Mosaic beginning to the Christian end. 'Those who study the prophecies with care,' says Origen, 'and are not content with a cursory perusal of the predictions contained in them, will find them such as to convince the intelligent and sincere reader that the spirit of God was in those men.'

And this brings us to what lay behind the appeal

both to miracles and prophecy, and gave to both their evidential value, and that is the self-evidence of the Incarnation—its sublimity and power. The earlier apologists continually emphasize these two characteristics of the Christian religion—the intrinsic sublimity of its conception of the nature and character of God, and its manifest power to transform the human heart, as no other agency had ever done, and that in the face of every form of opposition.

‘For although,’ says Origen, ‘from the very beginning all things opposed the spread of His doctrine in the world—both the princes of the times and their chief captains and generals, and all, to speak generally, who were possessed of the smallest influence, and in addition to these, the rulers of the different cities, and the soldiers, and the people—yet it proved victorious, as being the word of God, the nature of which is such that it cannot be hindered; and becoming more powerful than all such adversaries, it made itself master of the whole of Greece, and a considerable portion of barbarian lands, and converted countless numbers of souls to His religion <sup>1</sup>.’

But this argument from the moral and spiritual excellence and power of the Christian religion is an appeal to the natural reason of man. It implies that we can recognize a revelation when we see it,

<sup>1</sup> *Contr. Cels.* i. 27.

and to that extent that our intellect is akin to the divine. And this is the position emphatically maintained by the Fathers. They assert indeed the necessity of guidance by the Holy Spirit into truth, but the faculty so guided is already participant, by its very nature, of the divine reason, 'the light that lighteth every man coming into the world,' the 'image of God' in which man was created. Nor is it abstract reason, reason acting in isolation from man's other faculties, which, in the patristic view, recognizes the self-evidence of the Incarnation. It is that concrete reason which we have described above as the faculty that apprehends a complex subject-matter, reason that is acting in co-operation with conscience, will, and love, or in other words, the entire conscious personality. The congruity of the Incarnation with all that is noblest in our moral and spiritual nature is the fact to be apprehended; and it is on our moral and spiritual instincts therefore that the apprehension is primarily based. This is brought out clearly by Origen in his answer to Celsus. Celsus had spoken of Christian 'faith' as synonymous with 'irrational belief,' and Origen's reply is that so far from this being the case, Christian faith is only the religious application of the same faculty by which we adopt theories of the world, undertake voyages, marry and have children, plant and sow, and in a word carry on all the affairs of life.

‘And if the hope and belief of a better future be the support of life in every uncertain enterprise, why shall not this faith rather be rationally accepted by him who believes on better grounds than he who sails the sea, or tills the ground, or marries a wife, or engages in any other human pursuit, in the existence of a God who was the creator of all these things, and in Him who with surpassing wisdom and divine greatness of mind dared to make known this doctrine to men in every part of the world, at the cost of great danger, and of a death considered infamous, which He underwent for the sake of the human race<sup>1</sup>.’ Faith, in other words, is an instance of that concrete reasoning in which, as we have seen in a previous chapter, our entire personality takes part. And as such, in the language of Clement of Alexandria, ‘faith is supreme over and the criterion of demonstrated knowledge.’

Thus miracles, prophecy, and intrinsic self-evidence were the grounds of patristic belief; and the leaders in the formulation of that belief were profoundly intellectual men, and well acquainted with philosophy. They were not easily credulous; they knew the meaning of reasoning, and used their reason; while the background of their whole position is the thought, to which they repeatedly recur, that man was made in the image of God; that man’s rational and moral and spiritual nature



is sufficiently akin to God to recognize His self-revelation; and sufficiently important in the universe to render it reasonable that such a revelation should be made by God; in order that, in the words of Origen, 'man may in the end be deified, by the participation in His nature<sup>1</sup>.' And this presupposition, though traversed by materialism and agnosticism, has been reaffirmed with increasing emphasis, as we saw in our second chapter, by the whole body of spiritual philosophy in the last century, from the critical idealism of Kant to the teleological idealism of Lotze.

<sup>1</sup> Orig. *in Iohn.* ii. 50.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MODERN VIEW OF CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE

THE framers of those dogmatic definitions which ultimately became the creeds of the Christian Church conceived themselves, as we have seen, to be merely guarding the tradition of a fact. If they had intended to stereotype particular theories, to be believed for all time—as has sometimes happened in the subsequent history of the Church—their procedure would have been manifestly irrational. For no generation can bind those that come after, to its own outworn theories and partial points of view. But this is precisely what they did not intend to do. They intended to transmit the statement that certain facts had occurred. And if in the process of translating this statement, so to speak, they could not avoid imparting a theoretic element into it by the words which they employed, it was never their desire so to do ; it was their consistent aim to avoid so doing. And, broadly speaking, they succeeded in that aim. No two human beings, probably, have precisely the same conception of God ; not even defenders of the same doctrine, like Athanasius and Augustine ; still less

can successive generations or successive centuries think exactly alike. But behind all subtilties of conception, the object of the Fathers was to transmit the belief that God had become incarnate, and that God so incarnate had Himself revealed the existence of a Trinity in the Godhead; and this was beyond controversy the belief of St. Paul and St. John. Whatever development of language there may have been therefore, there can be no question that the fact which such language was intended to express was taught as fact before the end of the first century, and that the whole object of dogma was not to petrify, but to keep this fact alive in the minds of men, to prevent its evaporating into a theory, and preserve it as a faith, by which to live and for which to die.

Consequently, when we accept the Christian dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation at the present day, we are not entangling ourselves among obsolete speculations, as is sometimes mistakenly supposed; we are only professing our belief in a historic fact, of which the Christian Church—in the best language at its command—has recorded the tradition. Many subsequent theories have gathered round that fact; theories, for instance, of the reason for the Incarnation, of the nature of the Atonement, of the operation of divine grace; and these have often been dogmatically taught; but they are quite distinct and easily distinguishable from the primary

fact of the Incarnation, and of the Trinity as revealed through the Incarnation, which is all with which we are at present concerned.

On what grounds then does a modern Christian—when and in so far as he analyses the process—believe in the Incarnation? or, to put it otherwise, what would those grounds be which for the majority of Christians remain implicit, if they were explicitly stated in their logical order? We have seen that the Fathers appealed to the combination of miracles, prophecy, and intrinsic self-evidence. But it is obvious that lying behind these things, and qualifying their whole evidential significance, are the presuppositions of natural religion, to which we have alluded above. They believed, for the usual philosophic and moral reasons, on which they often expatiate at great length and with much eloquence, in a God, and a God whose ordering of the world attested His care for men; consequently in a God who was antecedently likely to reveal Himself to men. And it was the congruity of the Christian history and tradition and spiritual power with this antecedent probability which argued, in their judgment, its truth. The presuppositions of natural religion then lie at the root of Christian belief, and though the evidence for these is not now less strong—is in some ways even stronger—than of old, there are causes at work in the modern world which often impair its effect. Physical science is, in reality, a

revelation—a revelation of mysteries that we did not create; but it is not as a revelation, but as a discovery, that we habitually regard it. The part played by the human intellect in its attainment is so great, its ingenuity so exquisite, its achievement so brilliant, its advance so rapid, its success so sure, that we unconsciously tend to view the result as a human invention rather than a divine illumination. It is we ourselves who have triumphed; it is we ourselves who have won secret after secret from nature; we feel ourselves intellectually self-made men; we have the psychological temper of discoverers; we view things from the human, the intelligible side. Meanwhile the very amount of our knowledge tends in the same direction. We understand so much of the world we live in, and our time is so fully occupied with what we understand, that its mysterious environment is pushed out of sight. We are more impressed by the known than by the unknown, and in consequence immensely over-estimate the proportion which the former bears to the latter. And all this creates what may be called, in the strict sense, an irreligious type of mind—a type, that is to say, to which the distinctively religious view of the world—as theocentric rather than anthropocentric—seems alien and unfamiliar, and, in comparison with things of more practical moment, void of interest. Nor is this mental temper only incidental to the more

year that passes, more and more of the evidence that most powerfully makes for belief.

Thus we are living in the present day under conditions which, without being visibly irreligious and therefore startling, yet weaken the practical hold of religion upon the majority of men, with the result that the elementary truths of natural theology have to a great extent lost their force in the popular mind.

But these elementary truths are the presuppositions of Christianity. It is only because we believe the human soul with all its aspirations to have been created by a personal God that we expect Him to satisfy those aspirations by a revelation of Himself. It is only when we realize the extent to which the moral disorder and intellectual perplexity of humanity is due to sin, the weight with which the sense of sin has ever pressed upon the conscience of the race, and the yearnings and efforts towards atonement which it has inspired, that we can feel the appropriateness of Christianity to the needs of men, and the probability of its truth which that appropriateness suggests. It is only if we recognize in the harmony and beauty of the universe, and the endowments and history of man, evidence of God's providential care, that we are prepared for such a transcendent instance of His love as the Incarnation would afford. In a word, it is only as the climax of the

religious education and development of mankind that Christianity presents itself to the world, and only in this connexion that it can be understood. Obviously, therefore, where its leading doctrines are discussed in abstraction from this universal context, in an atmosphere which for the time has stifled the voice of natural religion, they are discussed at an unfair disadvantage, with no chance of appearing in their proper light.

This then is one of the grounds on which the Christian believes his position to be more truly rational than its popular opponent supposes. He remembers the weight and extent of the evidence for natural religion, and recognizes that the causes which at present obscure this evidence, in many minds, are of a kind which, as we have seen, do not in the least degree affect its truth; nor are, it may be, in themselves likely long to endure.

To return then to the way in which the doctrines of natural religion affect our belief in the Incarnation. First, there is the belief in God's providential care of the world. There have been times when the thought of God's transcendence of the world has been so emphasized, as entirely to remove Him from its detailed governance. But we now conceive of Him as immanent in, as well as transcendent over, the world; present in its every portion, co-operating with its every force, and, in the fullest sense, the life of the world: consequently as ruling

not merely by the imposition of general laws, but by the control of their particular application.

But if there is a God whose providence is particular as well as universal, the antecedent probability of His revealing Himself as fully as possible to man is immense. The value of this argument is often underrated on account of its *a priori* character. Ever since the days of Bacon there has been a prejudice in the English mind against *a priori* reasoning, as not admitting of verification, and being therefore unscientific. But this is an entirely mistaken notion; for in every induction that we draw, in every process by which a new scientific fact is established as such, the *a priori* activity of the mind, as we have pointed out in a previous chapter, is at work. The very search for causes, the very desire to understand the world, to which science owes its origin and progress, is, as we have repeatedly had occasion to notice, due to an *a priori* judgement of the mind. In a word, *a priori* action is an essential characteristic of all reason. And if this is the case even in the region of science, it is much more so in metaphysic and theology, on account of the nature of their subject-matter, as Bacon himself was quite ready to admit. Moreover, arguments from antecedent probability are by no means so exclusively *a priori* as their name may perhaps seem to suggest. They are often largely mingled



with inductive reasoning and appeals to experience. And this is so in the present case. For what are the parts of our argument? We believe in God; that is a belief in which large and complex inductions have had their share. We believe in His providential care of the universe: this again is a matter of induction. We find a particular being in that universe 'man' possessed of various desires and capacities, which his environment is nicely adapted to satisfy; and among those desires we find one, intense, passionate, imperious, capable indeed, like others, of being under certain conditions atrophied, but on a broad survey of humanity profoundly characteristic of our race, and that is the desire for communion with God. And we cannot bring ourselves to suppose that in a world, where we see so much evidence of design, such a desire would have been created except with a view to its satisfaction. Our reason demands that it should be so. God has taken the initiative, as we believe, in creating us, and we are compelled to conclude that He will continue to take the initiative in satisfying the desires which He has created. He must reveal Himself to us, as best we may be able to receive such a revelation. This then is our argument from antecedent probability<sup>1</sup>. It is no merely *a priori* conjecture, but a demand of our reason, based on induction and experience.

<sup>1</sup> See Note 3.

And so strong is it that, if there were no sign of such a revelation to be discovered, we should be thrown back upon our entire interpretation of nature, and driven to reconsider our conception of God. It is impossible to exaggerate the necessity of the inference that if God created us, He must reveal Himself to us. All the multitudinous and complex considerations therefore which make for Theism, make also, through Theism, for revelation. And this antecedent probability, be it noticed, is not antecedent, in the sense of being purely *a priori*; it is founded on induction from a wide experience, and is only antecedent in the sense of being entirely antecedent to and independent of the occurrence of a revelation. It is in no way derived from our belief in the Incarnation, but is an expectation to which natural religion inevitably leads.

And with this in our mind we are confronted by the story of the Gospels. However critically we may analyse them, the marvellous picture which they have created remains. And it is that picture, and not any critical explanation of it, which has dominated human history for nigh upon two thousand years. And what is that picture? It professes, in the form in which it has come down to us, to be a revelation of God to man. It has the very characteristics which we might imagine such a revelation to possess; for it startles, it surprises us, it takes away our breath; it is utterly unlike

what we should have expected ; we could never have invented it. And yet the longer we look at it, the more truly Godlike it appears. It is not what we thought God would be like, if we could see Him, but it surpasses our utmost thought. It is too superhuman not to be true. And not only so, but it has subserved the purpose, the only purpose, for which a revelation could be made. It has drawn all its serious believers into the experience of a closer communion with God. It has introduced in consequence a new type of spiritual life into the world. It has ennobled the whole subsequent history of our race. Can it be other than the revelation which, as Theists, we must antecedently expect?

This great major premiss, then, is in our mind when we approach the evidence of the Incarnation, predisposing us to believe it likely to be true. And this naturally, as we saw above in the case of the Gospels, makes a great difference in our estimate of the evidence. The main outlines of that evidence are the same for us as for the Fathers; miracles, prophecy, and intrinsic character, or self-attestation: though, as we must naturally start from what is nearest to our own experience, we view these three divisions in a somewhat different light. First for us is the Christian character, as a fact of present experience, a fact existing in the modern world, and historically traceable through

the ages back to its origin in Jesus Christ ; together with the way in which that character has gradually modified the art, the literature, the science, the ethical standard, the political ideals, the social progress of the world. The usual and only answer to this argument is to point to the high morality and noble lives of un-Christian thinkers like Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Spinoza, and kindred characters in modern times. But this argues entire ignorance both of history and human nature. The notorious defect of the ancient moralists as a whole was their practical weakness ; their insight was greater than their achievement ; they failed in many cases even to regulate their own lives, and much more to influence others. And even the noblest among them were spiritually sterile ; they had no ‘children in the faith,’ they could not elevate the world. Whereas, in direct contrast to this, the unique characteristic of nascent Christianity was its power. ‘Power’ is the word harped upon throughout the New Testament and the Fathers ; power to translate ideals into action ; and that not only in the hearts of the refined few, but of the vulgar many ; weak women, ignorant children, uncultivated slaves ; power to convert the grossest of sinners into miracles of sanctity and martyrs for their faith. It was this power which stirred society to its depths and revolutionized the world. And the same creative power has continued through the

ages, and is at work, as a fact of experience, in the world to-day. Nor has this power merely affected the personal lives of its possessors. It has worked through them outwards; and by degrees, and at the cost of many a martyrdom, raised the entire spiritual standard of the world. Hence when the noble lives of men who reject Christianity in the present day are quoted against us, we ask whence came their nobleness. The moral atmosphere in which they live is a Christian creation. The moral ideals at which they aim flowed from a Christian source. The moral character which they inherit is due to centuries of Christian self-control. And in many a case the formative influence of home and school upon their youth was Christian. Such men and women cannot be classed with Epictetus or Seneca. They have been created by Christianity, and however much they may reject its tenets, they cannot escape the pervasive influence of the power which has made them what they are. Children may leave their home and disown their parents, but they cannot change the strain of their blood. Nor, again, is the converse of this objection—the argument against Christianity from the bad lives of professing Christians—any more tenable. For we have the Christian code and the Christian character before us, and can judge professing Christians by them. And when we see that every immoral action done

in the name of Christianity is in flagrant contradiction of this code and character, we cannot allow the shallow criticism which attributes actions like the martyrdom of Bruno to Christianity, rather than to individual Christians who *ipso facto* palpably belied this name.

Moreover, to under-estimate the debt of morality to Christian influence is not only to ignore history, but to misinterpret human nature; for it is to under-estimate the power of sin, or moral evil in the world; whereas a great part of the self-evidence of Christianity consists in its manifest power of coping with sin. And this is a consideration to which the opponents of Christianity seldom give due weight. In the first place, they tend to attribute the emphasis which Christians lay upon sin to dogmatic causes; regarding the Christian view of sin as a dogma, derived from the Bible, and of questionable authority. But this is not the case. The sense of sin, and the burden of it, and the remorse which it inspires, are everywhere elements in natural religion. And the description of it in Genesis or the Epistle to the Romans is no more than a profound analysis of what every generation of men, in their more thoughtful moments, have dimly or clearly discerned to be true<sup>1</sup>. Its religious significance, as consisting in disobedience to God, may be denied; but this is a view which, as we

<sup>1</sup> See Note 4.

have seen, Christianity shares with natural religion. To deny it is not to deny a Christian dogma, but a fundamental instinct of the human race ; nor does this denial in any way extenuate the magnitude of moral evil as a fact. And in the second place, the majority of anti-Christian thinkers do not realize the intense malignity of sin, in the way that the Christian theologian does. The philosopher, or man of science, is himself, as a rule, a man of high moral tone, though perhaps forgetful, as we suggested above, of the ancestral efforts that have made him so. He is a man of high moral tone, and often free from the fiercer experience of evil in himself ; and it is not his business to make a special study of its operation in the outer world. He is, of course, aware of it, but he has not realized its malignity, like St. Paul, Augustine, or Luther. But the Christian theologian is in different case ; for as a rule he either is or has been a teacher or preacher or minister to souls, and it has been his business to watch sin in others as well as in himself. Consequently he is far abler to estimate the extent and intensity of moral evil, as well as that interconnexion of the sin of each with the sin of all, which gives it the solidarity of a great world-power.

Thus the two classes of thinkers have a very different realization of this great fact of experience. And it is only those who really appreciate the power of evil, and the impotence of the ordinary

human will to overcome it, that are in a position to estimate rightly the evidential value of the Christian triumph over sin. 'With authority He commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.' Of no other force in the world has this ever been, nor can it ever be, truly said.

Thus then to the modern Christian the self-evidence of Christianity is its strongest recommendation; and it is as subsidiary to this that its other kinds of evidence avail. It is the presupposition with which we approach both prophecy and miracles.

The appeal to prophecy, for instance, at one time consisted mainly in pointing out the minute accuracy with which the history of Christ had been foretold; such a supernatural preparation arguing a supernatural event. And modern criticism, as we all know, has considerably weakened the value of this appeal in its more superficial aspect. But even should it reduce the specifically Messianic element in particular prophecies to a vanishing point, which is more than we are at present disposed to anticipate, such a result would in no way affect the great argument from prophecy considered as a whole. For it would leave absolutely untouched the fact that the history and literature of Judaism is a Messianic prophecy from beginning to end; its subordinate elements—the particular types and anticipations—really owing their Mes-



sianic significance to the fact that they are a part of this great Messianic whole. For that history and literature exhibit a peculiar people that, in a manner unique in the world, was progressively led to realize the holiness of God, and the consequent necessity for holiness in man, together with its own vocation to bear witness to the fact; the prophets, like a conscience, not only testifying directly to this truth, but pointing to its confirmation in the various vicissitudes of the national life. And as a result there grows up a gradual expectation, in the noblest minds of the race, not only that righteousness from its own nature must ultimately triumph in the world, but that their own particular history is destined to culminate in that triumph and vindication of the ways of God to men. It is impossible to contemplate the picture of Judaism without feeling how it moves onward to this climax; and no critical rearrangement of the history or literature can alter the case; since it is the movement as a whole, and not the order of its parts, that is significant. The Decalogue which strikes its keynote is by common consent of the Mosaic age; and if many of the ordinances to which it led, and much of the spiritual insight which it inspired, should prove to be of later date than used to be supposed, this fact would only bring the parts of the history into closer harmony with the ordinary laws of evolution; it would not

alter the character of the history as a whole. But when we contemplate this picture, with the Christian presuppositions in our mind, with the knowledge of all that Christianity has been and is for the world, its prophetic significance is irresistible. We see a great divine idea moving onward, with infinite patience, to its realization; though a thousand years have to intervene between the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount. We feel the providential inspiration of the entire national development; and the Incarnation becomes its appropriate close. And seen in this light, the particular prophecies, which have always been regarded in the Christian Church as Messianic, retain their traditional character. For however clearly they may be shown to be primarily concerned with contemporary persons and events, these persons and events were stages in the development of the great Messianic history; partial anticipations, and therefore types of the complete realization which was still to come, and in coming to appropriate the whole prophetic movement to itself. Thus the mode in which we regard the evidence of prophecy may be somewhat altered; but the weight of the evidence, so far from being diminished by the alteration, is immensely increased.

Thus though the prophetic history is a thing of the past, and as such out of contact with our present experience, we approach it with at least

two presuppositions which are of present experience: firstly, our antecedent expectation, as Theists, of a revelation; and secondly, our knowledge of the Christian character as it exists to-day. And it is in the light of these presuppositions, and not when critically isolated from its present context, that the full significance of the argument from prophecy is felt.

And it will be obvious that the argument from miracles is in similar case<sup>1</sup>.

The modern attitude towards miracles is in all probability more largely due to the constructive philosophy of Spinoza than to the scepticism of Hume. For there was a magnificence about Spinoza's conception of the universe, as the necessary and immutable expression of the divine substance, which, coinciding as it did with the advance of physical science, had a powerful effect on the imagination of the world, and contributed, more than any other single influence, to the belief in a reign of law, under which freedom had no place. It was magnificent, but it was not philosophy; for it implied that the central fact of human experience was an illusion, and with that, philosophy itself and science too would have to disappear. And we have now come to see that law is not the oppressor but the instrument of freedom, the subordinate means of which freedom is the end or final cause.

<sup>1</sup> See Note 5.

We may illustrate this by reference to the game of chess, to which human life has so often been compared. The end and object of a game of chess is the contention of skill, which may be called a kind of intercourse, between the minds of the two players; and the aim of each player is originality, either in attack or defence. But the game can only be played from the fact that the shape and markings of the board, and the number, and position, and characteristic movements of the pieces, are immutably fixed. For it is this fixture which makes the pieces, like a common language or a current coin, a possible mode of intercourse between the two players. Yet out of those fixed relations, and just because they are fixed and can therefore be depended upon, the player produces a free game—a game which is the intelligent creation of his own mind, and which he can vary at will. Moreover, in the case of an inferior player contending with a master: the latter can freely allow the former to make what moves he pleases, within the laws of the game; and yet successfully counteract them in the end. And we may apply this analogy to the universe at large. Precisely because its physical relations and properties are like the characteristic moves of the chess-men, uniform and fixed, and can therefore be permanently relied upon, when once they are understood, man is able to make them the instruments

of his own free agency, in a way that, if they were capricious, would be impossible. And the real limitation of man's freedom is not due to the laws of nature, but to his ignorance of them; since the more he comes to understand them, the more he can control them for his use.

For the same reason, God, who must have absolute knowledge, will, without ever violating the laws of His creation, be absolutely free; and can allow relative freedom therefore to His creatures, while retaining, like the master player, the power to control the issues of that freedom at His will. Such a conception of the universe is not only nobler than that of materialism or pantheism, but it is in truer accordance with all the experience of it that we possess. For the actual world as we know it is full of spontaneity, from the movements of the lowliest organism to the free activity of man.

But on this view of the universe all *a priori* objection to miracle disappears. For if the final cause of all mechanism is spirit, of all law is freedom, there can be no unreason in supposing that God might, without any contradiction of the laws of His creation, but as a result of His perfect knowledge of those laws, produce an unusual effect for an adequate spiritual end. And when we reflect on all that Christianity has done and is still doing for the human race, it is impossible to deny

that its introduction to the world was an adequate spiritual end.

Although, therefore, the Christian miracles cannot be for us what they were for those to whom they first occurred, we can nevertheless recognize their original necessity—to arrest the attention of an age whose modes of thought were simpler and less scientific than our own, and to which they would appeal as a perfectly appropriate mode of spiritual address. While for us too, when once accepted, they have an importance of their own, as illustrating and emphasizing the cosmic significance of the Incarnation, its relation to the universe at large; which is not only the central thought of our Christian philosophy, but an essential element in the belief that sustains all our Christian practice<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See my *Divine Immanence*, c. iv and v.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE INFLUENCE OF CHARACTER ON THE FORMATION OF PRESUPPOSITIONS

**I**T will be obvious, from the foregoing pages, that the reasonableness of the Christian position depends upon the reasonableness of its presuppositions; that many things which in the abstract would seem improbable, are quite the reverse when viewed in their concrete context; that is to say in the light of their appropriate presuppositions; and that a Christian owes the security of his faith to his confidence in the truth of his presuppositions, which, as we have seen, are a part of his general philosophy of life. But there is a strong tendency in the English mind to resent this reference to presuppositions. *Exaequat ingenia*, said Bacon, when inculcating the importance of the inductive method, 'it puts all minds on an equality.' In other words, he regarded induction as a kind of machine, from which any one, by merely turning its handle, could grind the same amount of knowledge. It would give the 'bare facts,' and the 'bare facts' would then speak for themselves. And we have seen how Locke

and Hume perpetuated this error by their failure to recognize the true character of the mental element in experience. *Exaequat ingenia* ; even in the more abstract sciences such a statement is, as we have seen, only approximately true ; and when applied to a complex and concrete subject-matter like religion it is fatally misleading. And yet it is the underlying assumption on which much popular controversy proceeds ; the assumption that we can attain truth by criticism of facts, without the further need of criticizing the minds which make that criticism what it is, and those facts what they are. The fallacy of this will be obvious, after what we have been saying ; yet it is a fallacy which still has influence, and nowhere more so than in the treatment of religious questions. For the very fact that religion is common property, a thing that concerns all men, easily leads to the assumption that all men are competent to pass opinions on its falsity or truth. To maintain the opposite savours, in the ordinary mind, of obscurantism ; of intellectual weakness that cannot face the light of day ; of over-subtlety or duplicity or confusion of thought. All the more important therefore is it to emphasize the inability of the human mind to act without presuppositions, of one kind or another ; and the consequent necessity for criticizing our presuppositions, as a preliminary to criticizing anything else—a necessity which is all the greater on



account of the obscure way in which many of those presuppositions act: we are often possessed by them, rather than possess them; they are a part of our subconscious or unconscious self, and must be brought out into the clear light of consciousness before their true value can be ascertained.

When then we do this, with the Christian presuppositions that we have mentioned above, it will be obvious, from a consideration of our previous chapters, upon what grounds we think them reasonable; and not only reasonable, but far more reasonable than any which can be brought against them.

In the first place, we remember that our cardinal presupposition—Theism—and all that it involves, lies in the region of philosophy, and not of any special science; that the dominant tradition in philosophy has been distinctly in its favour, and that mainly on the ground of moral and spiritual experience, which was as accessible to Plato as to Kant; and in consequence that no new discoveries of science or criticism can affect it, since they do not touch the region wherein its real roots are set. And though of course our Theism must rest primarily upon such evidence as we can personally verify, and not on the authority of others, yet its confirmation by this august tradition is of immense additional significance; since it implies that similar evidence has satisfied a long line of the

greatest thinkers of the past. And it is important to bear this authoritative corroboration of Theism in mind, when we are confronted, as we often are, by controversial objections which, in the minds of those who urge them, rest entirely upon authority, and authority of an immeasurably inferior kind, being often no more than that of a particular teacher, or a passing fashion in opinion, magnified—from simple ignorance—out of all proportion to their real place in the world of thought.

Then there are the expectations of a revelation to which Theism gives rise. These we have seen to be due to a perfectly natural use of reason ; and they too are corroborated by the number and quality of the minds that have felt their weight. And this confirmation of a rational conviction by authority, which in abstract science would be superfluous if not illegitimate, is an important factor in that concrete reasoning, of which probability and not demonstration is the aim.

But beside these main presuppositions which admit of intellectual formulation, there are many others of a more personal nature, in which emotion and will have an important place, that lead the Christian to regard his evidences in a different light from other men. We have already alluded to the part played by character, and therefore by all that goes to form character, in cases of concrete reasoning, and especially in religious argument,

which is the most complex and concrete of all. But it may be well to illustrate the point at greater length. Take the case of a child who has been carefully trained from infancy to admire goodness, to obey conscience, to prefer duty to pleasure; who has responded to this teaching during those early days in which the foundations of character are laid, and continues this response during his mature years; and contrast it with that of one who, with progressive abandonment, has pursued pleasure and self-will. The former will have gained a more accurate sense of the distinction between good and evil; he will know goodness from the inside, and consequently feel its attraction; in the language of the psychologists, he will be interested in it, and therefore direct his attention to it, and therefore recognize it wherever it exists. But the latter—it is a fact of daily experience—will gradually lose his sense of moral distinctions, till he is unable to recognize goodness when he sees it, attributing its appearance to unworthy motives; assimilating it, that is, to the only thing that he now knows, and regarding it as a form of evil. Here then we have, as the results of causes which are mainly emotional and moral, a total difference in the intellectual attitude to which they lead. And it is worth noticing how strongly the necessity of this result—which has always been familiar to the moralist—is emphasized

by modern psychology ; with its insistence on the part played by interest and attention, that is by feeling and will, in determining our experience and therefore our knowledge.

Hence while the moral insight of the bad man is progressively atrophied, that of the good man is intensified as years go on. And it is obvious how this will affect their estimate of the moral evidences of religion. The prevalence of pain in the world, for example, will afford hopeless perplexity to the man for whom pleasure is the only good ; whereas the man who can so recognize its disciplinary value as to say, 'It is good for me that I have been in trouble,' will to that extent, at any rate, see in it a proof, instead of a disproof, of the goodness of God. Or, again, we have seen what an important element in the evidence for Christianity is the type of character which it produces, as exhibited by contemporary Christians. But this evidence must depend entirely upon the ability to appreciate the character in question ; which, again, is only possible to the possessor of spiritual insight. Here then we have instances of the way in which moral and emotional predispositions profoundly modify the intellectual estimate of evidence.

'It is the soul that sees ; the outward eyes  
Present the object ; but the mind descries.'

We have illustrated this, for the sake of clear-

ness, by supposing two extreme cases ; whereas the majority of characters may lie between these extremes, though usually with a dominant tendency, in one direction or the other. But this only means that the influence of the character upon the judgment being more composite, will be more obscure. Its operation may be less obvious, but it will not cease to operate ; while it must further be remembered that many faults of character, which are commonly regarded as venial, such for example as indolence or self-importance, may be quite as destructive of insight as open immorality would be, and all the more so from the insidious method of their action. Thus the universal law of spiritual apprehension is that the capacity for it varies with the variations of moral character.

Now this principle is true of moral character in general ; but for insight into questions that are specifically religious, the religious man has still further qualifications than the man who is merely moral, without also being religious. For it is the necessary endeavour of the religious man, as such, not only to become moral, but furthermore to live in communion with God. And in proportion as this endeavour is earnest, it forces the man to an exceptional degree of sincerity with himself. He examines his own motives, with a view to seeing himself as he believes that God must see him. He not only prays, but desires to grow more

capable of praying—to grow in the life of prayer. And prayer—real prayer—is an unique school of sincerity. And, as a result of all this, he comes to be more acutely aware than other men of the extent to which his spiritual nature is impaired by sin. This is the cause of those extreme confessions of sinfulness which so often surprise us in the mouths of the greatest saints. They have not been more sinful, probably much less so than their fellows; nor are they morbid; they simply judge themselves by an absolute instead of a relative standard; and so realize the gulf that exists between their sinful personality and its sinless ideal, and the hindrance that it is to their communion with God. And this is the real origin of that deep difference in men's estimate of moral evil to which we alluded in the previous chapter. For it is only those who desire to be religious, in the sense of living in intercourse with God, that can recognize the specifically disabling effect of sin upon that intercourse; while, again, it is only this recognition that can induce the penitential attitude of mind which leads to the recovery of spiritual insight. Whereas the man, whose aim is merely moral and not also spiritual life, however sincerely he may regret, and however successfully he may combat the evil impulses of his nature, will remain unaware of the blinding influence which those impulses exercise upon the spirit; and to the

extent that he is unaware of it will disbelieve in its existence, and continue for that very reason to be more completely under its sway. Here then is a further illustration of the fact that insight varies with character. It is keener in the moral than in the immoral man, but keener still in the religious than in the merely moral man.

Now a sincere Christian would naturally be diffident in claiming any superior degree of morality for himself, and would hesitate to impute its absence, unless in very obvious cases, to an individual opponent. But he can at least claim for himself religious aspiration, with the penitential attitude which it involves ; as against any opponent who professedly disclaims it, and to that extent prefer his own judgement to that of otherwise abler men. But what he must and does feel, with far greater confidence, is the general action of the principle in question ; so that religious thinkers as a whole, and in proportion to their earnestness, are to be credited with more spiritual insight than any other class of men.

This fact then is a further corroboration, to the Christian, of the reasonableness of his position. For when he is confronted with the various argumentative objections to Christianity, he remembers that, however intellectual these objections may appear to be, they are never purely intellectual in reality. Theism itself, as he will know, the

elementary foundation of all further religious belief, rests far more on moral and spiritual than on intellectual considerations, while the strength of any deduction from Theism, such as the probability of a revelation, depends entirely upon the intensity and earnestness with which the Theism is realized. And as we have seen that Theism and belief in the probability of a revelation become in their turn presuppositions which qualify our treatment of all subordinate points of evidence, it follows that what determines the former will ultimately affect the latter; that is to say, that the spiritual insight, which gives reality to our Theism, will thereby influence our judgement of the probability of a miracle, or the authenticity of a Gospel, exclusively intellectual as at first sight such judgement might appear.

And, this being the case, it is an immense argument in favour both of Theism and Christianity, that their strongest advocates are among the men most qualified by character for spiritual insight; and this not in a few cases only, but in a long catena through the ages; while, on the other hand, their average opponents have conspicuously not been so endowed. Rare exceptions, due to exceptional causes, cannot weaken this impression, which the total survey of history conspires to confirm. And though, as we have said, this is not a conviction that can often be urged in par-



ticular controversy with individuals, where it would not only be invidious but might also be inapplicable, it is always present, and profoundly influential as a silent presupposition, in the background of the Christian consciousness. It is impossible, as well as needless for our purpose, to enumerate the myriad ways in which spiritual insight acts ; for, as we have seen, it really qualifies the entire judgement of its possessor, like an aesthetic sense, giving an additional cogency to all the arguments that make for Theism, and through Theism for Christianity.

But there is one aspect of its action, closely connected with what we have been saying, that calls for some further notice ; its influence upon our estimate of human nature, on the dignity and capacity of man ; because this is an important element in the Christian position. Man, to the materialist, is simply an animal, part of nature's mechanism—'the human animal,' the 'man machine'; and therefore as unimportant to the universe at large, as his earth is insignificant among the stellar spaces. And however often speculative materialism may be refuted, there is always enough practical materialism in the world to give wide currency to such an opinion. And it is this undercurrent of practical materialism—with its low estimate of humanity—that is the strongest negative presupposition against Theism, and still more against the Incarnation. It should be remembered

therefore that practical materialism is not a creed issuing in a conduct, but a conduct issuing in a creed; it means sensuality in one form or another, a life interested in and therefore exclusively attentive to the enjoyments and employments of sense; till it can see nothing else, and therefore denies that anything else can exist—the atrophy of insight of which we have been speaking above. But man to the idealist is the key to the universe in virtue of his moral nature, his power of realizing good ends<sup>1</sup>.

For it is an essential characteristic of our reason to demand the final cause of things; to ask not only how but why the universe exists; what is its object? what is its end? Our conviction that the world is rational, from which all science springs, necessarily involves this further thought—not only that the existence of things should be understood, but that it should be justified. That and nothing short of that is what we mean by being rational. But when we look at the material world, in which ‘all things move, and there is nothing permanent’—as the old Greek thinker said—we see no sign of an end. Each momentary phase of existence is a means to the phase of the next moment, and that again to the succeeding moment, in endless processes of change, which afford no ultimate satisfaction, no rest for the mind.

<sup>1</sup> See Note 6.

Nor, again, in the human intellect considered in the abstract, as the capacity for understanding things, do we find what we need. For we cannot regard mere contemplation as an adequate end, or suppose the universe existing merely to be understood. But when we turn to man's moral nature, the case is different. For as a moral being man is capable of realizing ends which he feels ought to be, and which therefore he calls right and good. He can create out of all the shifting play of circumstance around him, ends that shall satisfy his reason—moral ends. We need not pause to consider why goodness satisfies us; but it is so. The same necessity which impels us to seek final causes, compels us to recognize goodness as one of the things that we so seek—an end in itself, a thing of independent value or worth.

Every human being, therefore, is able through his bodily action, and its interaction with his environment, to endow the material order with final causation, to transform it into an instrument for the realization of moral ends. And this gives man at once a key to the meaning of the universe. For what he knows to be possible within his own limited experience, and to be the only adequate issue of that experience, he infers to be probable in the universe at large. Indeed his reason demands it, for his reason, as we have repeatedly had occasion to state, is convinced that the world

is a rational order; and this must mean that its moral, no less than its mathematical or physical relations, conform to reason; or in other words, that those moral ends must be ultimately realized which reason declares ought to be. And this capacity for realizing moral ends, and thereby forming for itself a moral character, lifts human personality above the material order into the region of things that are ends-in-themselves, or final causes; things that are worthy to exist for their own sake, and not merely as means to anything else; things of positive value. And though this statement may sound somewhat technical, and unlike the thoughts of ordinary men about themselves, it is only the technical expression of those ordinary thoughts of which all men, who are not materialists, are implicitly aware. And if his capacity for morality invests man with this essential dignity, his capacity for religion raises this dignity to a still higher degree. For in the light of religion, he recognizes his moral ends to be the will of God; and himself as a moral being, therefore to be capable of willing what God wills, of realizing the will of God in himself, and to that extent co-operating with the divine purpose of the world, the final cause of all final causes<sup>1</sup>.

But the men who are most acutely conscious of their capacity and the dignity that it involves

<sup>1</sup> See Note 7.

are also, as we have seen, most keenly aware of their immeasurable distance from their own ideal. Hence their desire for a divine assistance, on which they may consciously rely, and therefore for a revelation of God.

Now it is man's worth or value, man's rank in the universe, considered as a moral and spiritual being, that constitutes the Christian answer to all arguments against the Incarnation which are grounded on the supposed insignificance of man—that he is too unimportant to be the object of so stupendous an event as an Incarnation. For a being who knows himself to be capable of co-operating with the purposes of God, and therefore of union with God in will, cannot regard himself as intrinsically unlikely to be a special object of divine interest, or think it improbable that he should receive such divine assistance as may best enable him to realize this high prerogative of his nature; while the force of this conviction will obviously be strongest among the men who have most moral and spiritual insight, and consequently best understand what the possibilities of human nature really are.

Then there is man's desire for a revelation considered as a reason for expecting it; to which we have alluded in a previous chapter. Abstractedly stated this might seem a weak argument; but to be appreciated it must be viewed in its concrete context. It is not a desire for speculative satis-

faction of the intellect, but for practical satisfaction of the life. It is the desire of a moral being, for that which will enable him to fulfil his function, in a rationally ordered world. All these points are essential to the argument. Its major premiss is the conviction of reason that the world is intelligible; that is to say, it is rationally and, therefore, teleologically ordered. And we have already seen how this conviction lies at the root of all science as well as of all philosophy; and that every advance in science is a fresh step in its justification. But if this is true of the physical order of the world, it must be equally true of the moral, with which the physical order is inseparably blended, and in which in fact it culminates; and accordingly reason assumes, and cannot help assuming, that the moral world must be rationally and intelligibly ordered; and this means that its ideals will be realized, and what ought to be will come to pass. Reason thus postulates the triumph of morality as part of the rationality of the world—a postulate by which, it will be remembered, Kant justified our hope of immortality as being the necessary condition for this triumph<sup>1</sup>. And the expectation of a revelation to assist our moral life is really only a part of this general expectation of the ultimate triumph of morality. We are experimentally conscious of our inability to do, without divine assistance, what our

<sup>1</sup> See Note 8.

reason imperatively assures us that we ought to do ; and therefore, because we trust the assurance of our reason, we expect such assistance to come.

Finally, there is the desire for communion with God. This is an emotional yearning, and distinct from though necessarily commingled with the desire to do our duty, to realize our moral self. Nor can it so easily be used in argument as the latter ; since the sense of moral obligation, the need to realize what ought to be, may be said, if we include its rudimentary forms, to be an almost universal characteristic of the human race ; even immoral men recognizing its existence. But this cannot be said of the desire for communion with God, in at all the same degree. True, we may believe with Augustine that this desire lies at the root of human personality ; and that all the unrest and love of false excitement in the world is due to its unnatural suppression by sin. 'We are restless till we rest in Thee.' Yet the fact remains that it is suppressed, beyond power of recognition, in the majority of mankind ; and cannot therefore be used in argument as unreservedly as the moral sense. On the other hand, for the minority, in whom it does exist, it is the strongest possible reason for expecting a revelation. For they feel it to be the fundamental desire of their entire personality ; and cannot conceive that in a rational, a purposeful world, such a personality

should have been created, except with a view to its satisfaction, a satisfaction which only revelation of one kind or another could afford. Nor are they disturbed in this reasoning by the absence of the desire in question from other men; because while those in whom it is suppressed are unaware of its existence, those who possess it can see, as plainly as Augustine, that it is not really non-existent in these men, but suppressed, and that with moral and spiritual development it would revive—in other words, that it is a characteristic of normal humanity, but atrophied or distorted by sin. And it is the answer of the Incarnation to this yearning of the human heart, which to many minds is the most convincing proof of its truth. Here, therefore, we have an evidence of Christianity which has been profoundly influential, yet of whose very existence only men of spiritual insight can be aware; while even by them its argumentative cogency cannot be stated in logical terms, since it consists in the intensity of the emotion which they experience. ‘Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God.’

Thus, throughout the entire range of Christian evidence, the same intellectual propositions will wear a totally different aspect to different characters of mind, nor can they ever convey the whole weight of conviction with which they are really charged, except to the sympathetic interpretation of spiritual insight.



## CHAPTER X

### CHRISTIANITY AN APPEAL TO OUR ENTIRE PERSONALITY

WE will now turn to the content of Christianity, the substance of the Christian religion, with a view to seeing what light that content throws upon its claim to be a revelation. What then does Christianity, regarded as a revelation, profess to reveal? In the first place, it does not profess to reveal speculative truth about God, for the satisfaction of our intellectual curiosity; or in any way to enable us to understand the divine nature, as distinct from its relation to ourselves. Its object is essentially practical. And the Fathers are as emphatic as any of the Agnostic schools of philosophy, on the incomprehensibility of the divine nature—its absolute transcendence of our present faculties of thought. And accordingly we saw that they regarded the dogmas of theology as possessing only a regulative, and not a speculative value; as being entitled, that is to say, to rule our belief, merely because they were the most accurate, or least inaccurate modes of stating those facts of history, of which the Christian revelation claims to

consist. In the second place, it does not profess to reveal a mere code of morality. The Sermon on the Mount—much of which, as we are so often told, was not original, nor beyond the discovery of man's natural reason—is not the substance of, nor in any way coextensive with the Christian revelation. What then is the essence of that revelation, as it has been handed down by the Christian tradition? Briefly that God is Love; and that this is possible, because there is a Trinity of Persons within the Godhead, between whom the reciprocity of love can exist, a divine society: that, out of this love, God has become man, under such conditions as would most appeal to the human heart; in order to rescue man from his sinful state, and unite him in Love to Himself: that, having thus become man, He has founded a human society, united and sustained in being and vitalized in action, by the selfsame Spirit of Love which is the very bond of the divine society—to represent that divine society upon earth, and continue the work of gathering mankind into communion with Himself. Such in abstract outline is what we mean by the Christian revelation; and we believe that it came into the world through the historic fact of the personality and teaching of Jesus Christ. And though the human society, because it is human, has been marred by the imperfections of humanity; its witness obscured, its efficiency impaired, its unity

divided into fragmentary groups; yet we believe that among all the serious members of those groups a life of love is still exhibited, which did not exist before the advent of Jesus Christ into the world, and since that advent has not ceased to exist; love, which is not founded on the natural attractions that form ordinary friendships, but on the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and in this sense, supernatural; embracing primarily 'the brethren'—fellow Christians as such—and secondarily the human race, as an object of missionary effort; a life of which love is not an occasional episode, but the sole motive-power and force. Nor does the diversity of views upon the nature and constitution of the Church affect the central fact, upon which practically all Christians are agreed, that the foundation of a society—a kingdom of God—was the final object of the Incarnation.

Thus the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Church together constitute the revelation that God is Love. To what faculty then in man is such a revelation really addressed, and, by consequence, what faculty can pass any criticism upon it? Of course it must be understood, to begin with; but for all that, it is not addressed primarily to our intellect. For though on its man-ward side it is perfectly intelligible, its God-ward side partakes of the divine incomprehensibility; we cannot understand either

the nature of the Trinity, or the mode of the Incarnation, or the action of the Holy Spirit. Hence there is no attempt at demonstration about it—which is the method of address to the pure intellect—no appeal to its rational necessity. And not only is this the case, but it is obvious, if we reflect, that it must be the case. For no revelation of God could possibly be made to our intellect under its present conditions; in the sense of enabling us to comprehend Him; which would be synonymous with possessing universal knowledge. Indeed it would be too commonplace a truism to dwell upon—that the finite cannot comprehend the Infinite—if it were not for the fact that many thinkers who admit the statement in theory retract it in practice; by criticizing, for instance, the doctrine of the Trinity, or the possibility of the Incarnation, in a way that implies more intellectual knowledge of God than they can, by the nature of the case, possess. It is absolutely rational, therefore, to recognize that a revelation of God could not be primarily addressed to our reason. On the other hand, a revelation which exhibits God as loving us, and demanding our response to His love, plainly is addressed to the emotions and the will. These indeed are only functions of one indivisible personality, and cannot act without the concurrence of the intellect; the intellect must interpret the terms of the revelation, and make its meaning

clear ; but the emotions and the will must be the dominant factors in determining its truth. One may illustrate this from the case of love between two human beings. If I have no love for a person, and therefore no desire for his love, I should not notice, and therefore should not discover any indications of his love for me ; much less should I act so as to elicit such indications. But if, on the contrary, I love him intensely, and therefore intensely desire his love, I at once become alive to the slightest, subtlest sign of what I desire. My affection quickens my insight, and I see in words, and looks, and deeds, that might otherwise have seemed indifferent, evidence that my love is returned. Nor only so ; but I shall inevitably express my feeling in action, a pressure of the hand, a glance of the eye, a word or deed of kindness ; with a view to elicit some response that may render my assurance doubly sure. And thus, through the operation of my emotions and my will, I gain the conviction that I am loved. This conviction when gained may be formulated in language, and called intellectual : 'I know that I am loved.' But the method whereby it was gained was mainly emotional and volitional ; and the degree of certainty, with which I hold the conviction, still rests on my faith in the infallibility of the insight of love.

Here then we have an analogy to the process by

which we apprehend the Christian revelation of love. First we must have, in some degree, a love of God, or a desire for His love. This may take various forms. It may begin with the love of all that is good and beautiful and lovable and true among finite things, leading us on to the aspiration for communion with their source; or to put it otherwise, it may be the love, in us, of all these things coming to recognize itself as really a love of God. Or it may be an immediate yearning, without these intermediary stages, towards the infinite and absolute Being on whom we feel that we depend. Or it may be the desire to escape from sin; or a complex combination of all these elements, which we cannot clearly analyse. But whatever the mode of its development, the existence of this personal desire in us, as distinct from any merely intellectual curiosity, is the presupposition of our recognizing Christianity as a revelation of divine love. The presence of the presupposition will not of course necessitate this conclusion. We may possess the desire and still fail to recognize its fulfilment in Christianity; though this is probably rather the exception than the rule; but we shall certainly not recognize the fulfilment, unless we have the prevenient desire.

How then does this desire act? It enables us to recognize love when we see it. For we must remember that it is a real, personal desire, a yearn-

ing of our whole being—‘My soul is athirst for God.’ And this quickens our insight into the general evidence of love in the world, as preparing us for a revelation of love—

‘All thou dost enumerate  
Of power and beauty in the world,  
The mightiness of love was curled  
Inextricably round about.  
Love lay within it and without,  
To clasp thee’—

and thence into the love exhibited in the Christian story and the Christian society. However much we may criticize the details of the Christian story, it ‘decomposes but to recompose.’ It remains; it cannot be got rid of; it still confronts the world; and it has commended itself to loving hearts throughout the ages, as too profound to be an invention, too magnificently superhuman to be other than true.

‘What doubt in thee could countervail  
Belief in it? Upon the ground  
“That in the story had been found  
Too much love! How could God love so?”  
He who in all His works below  
Adapted to the needs of man,  
Made love the basis of the plan,—  
Did love, as was demonstrated:  
While man, who was so fit instead

To hate, as every day gave proof,—  
Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,  
Both could and did invent that scheme  
Of perfect love.'

This is the alternative before us ; that the story of the Incarnation, with its root in the Trinity and its fruit in the Church, is true, or that all its wonderful completeness, its coherence, its complexity is an invention, and that not even the conscious invention of one mind, but a result upon which many minds through successive acts of misapprehension have more or less blunderingly stumbled in the end. And though, when thus stating the case in language, one unavoidably presents it in terms of intellectual probability, it is to the heart, be it remembered, that this alternative is really presented, and it is the heart that is its judge. The heart, with its yearning for God and its sense of sin and separation from Him, feels that this tale of love and atonement, which answers so profoundly to its own inmost needs, cannot be a fiction, but must be a fact. Nor does the story of the Incarnation stand alone. There is the Christian society which dates from it, and spans the gulf between it and ourselves, and brings us into touch with its living influence here and now. We have already dealt with this evidence in another connexion, but must return to the point in our present context. Christians believe that



the Christian society exhibits in humanity to-day the same love which Jesus Christ exhibited on earth nineteen centuries ago—a love characterized by the same austerity to sin and tenderness to sinners, the same intensity, the same self-sacrifice, the same unwearying patience in well-doing, the same inward joy under outward sorrow, the same conscious dependence upon God. And here again the heart is judge. It is only by looking for these things with sympathetic insight that we are able to detect them, hidden as they are behind the unreality, and inconsistency, and selfishness of that nominal Christianity which is often all that strikes the unreflecting public eye. But when we look for them they are there—these characteristics of a love that is more than human; nor are they sporadic or exceptional, but part of a great stream of life that has flowed on beneath the surface of the ages; inspiring martyrs, confessors, missionaries, holy and humble men of heart; saints of the court, and the camp, and the family; saints of the convent and the desert; students, teachers, preachers, rulers; lives of action, lives of passion, lives of prayer; a great multitude whom no man can number; the veritable salt of the earth. Such is the Christian society, and its living representatives are still among us; we can touch the hem of their garments, we can see their shadow passing by to-day. And what is the object of this society?

for what purpose does it exist? Simply to convince men that God has revealed Himself as love, and to attract them into union with that love, and thereafter support and sustain them in the life consequent upon that conviction; in other words, to be the human instrument through which the love of God embraces mankind. Now the existence of this society is a fact, and its inseparable connexion with Jesus Christ is a fact. Not only is it impossible to separate it from Him, but it is impossible to separate Him from it. To think of Him is to think of it, and of its work in the world. Moreover, there is a marvellous identity in the Christian character throughout the ages. Behind the profound differences which distinguish the centuries from one another, behind the diverse temperaments of different nations and races, behind the variety of opinions by which Christians themselves have been divided, and the intellectual limitations by which their horizon has been confined, the Christian character has remained the same. What it was in St. Paul it has been in all subsequent Christians, in however less eminent a degree, and that character has consisted in conformity to the example of Jesus Christ, while its possessors are unanimous in ascribing its possibility exclusively to Him. 'I live, yet not I: Christ liveth in me.' They know their own inner history, and are absolutely assured that it is superhuman; and

that to this extent they are living manifestations of God's love working in the world, living revelations, in however dim and distant a degree, of God to their fellow men.

Nor is it only the heart that is involved in this conviction, for when once the feelings are enlisted, as in the parallel case of friendship, the will follows suit. We begin to put the Christian life into practice, and as we do so are progressively assured of its truth, and so verify for ourselves the promise of its Founder: 'If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be from God, or whether I speak of Myself.' Thus a revelation of love, though it may be and must be expressed and explained in intellectual terms, can only be tested and criticized by the emotions and the will; they alone can estimate its cogency, they alone can affirm that it rings true.

Nor does this emotional nature of the Christian appeal in any way detract from its completeness. On the contrary, it is the very point in which that completeness consists. For mere intellectual illumination does not necessarily affect the emotions or the will. 'The understanding is no motive,' as Aristotle said long ago (*διάνοια αὐτῇ οὐθὲν κινεῖ*). Whereas the emotions and the will, when once aroused, do carry the intellect forward with them. We need not love what we understand, but we cannot help endeavouring to understand what we

love. Indeed the fact that man's reason more obviously differentiates him from the lower animals than do his feelings, or those active impulses which are the rudiments of his will, often misleads us into thinking and speaking, as if reason were the very constitutive essence of human personality, and man

‘A reasoning self-sufficing thing, an intellectual all in all.’

Whereas reason rather illuminates than constitutes human nature. It is the lamp that renders the book legible rather than the book itself. Reason converts men's animal emotions into conscious self-sacrificing love, and his animal activity into free-will ; but the love and the will are in their elementary form more fundamental, and in their developed form more final, than the reason which thus enfranchises them ; more fundamental, for feeling is at work in every individual, prompting him to will, long before reason is awake ; more final, for the ultimate goal to which all his thinking tends is invariably, in the last analysis, the attainment of emotional satisfaction. This was the point rightly emphasized, though wrongly interpreted, by Schopenhauer, in his polemic against Hegel—the fundamental place of will in the universe ; will being, in his use of the term, hardly distinguishable from desire. And the teaching of modern psychology, as we have noticed in a previous chapter, is all to the same effect—that the simplest

manifestation of organic life is a more or less spontaneous response to stimulus, a rudimentary act of will, consequent upon a rudimentary feeling either of pleasure or of pain, and that thence through all grades of human activity desire is the motive, and the satisfaction of desire the object of the will, however much reason may intervene to shape and qualify and exalt our desires. And Christian thinkers have always emphasized this fact from their ethical point of view. 'Strictly speaking,' says Augustine, 'every man is nothing else than a will' (*immo nihil aliud nisi voluntates omnes sunt*); and again, 'The will is superior to the intellect' (*voluntas superior intellectu*), says Duns Scotus. While the nominalists with their interest in the individual naturally speak to the same effect. 'The distinguishing characteristic (*generalis differentia*) of man as man,' says Raymond of Sabunde, 'is his free-will.' Hence in appealing to love which moves the will, Christianity appeals to the very root of our personality, the only thing which ensures the concurrence of every function of our being. Nor is the appeal to love merely complete in its intensity, as embracing our whole nature; it is also complete in its extension, as including the entire human race. For in one degree or another, in one fashion, or another, all men are susceptible of love. And if we analyse our personality we see how inevitably this is so. For while

on the one hand a person is a self, an independent centre of being, on the other he is essentially dependent for his development, his realization, his life upon other persons who are not himself. Dependence is as fundamental a characteristic of personality as self-identity. A person is, by his very make and constitution, a social being. And in love this dependence is most fully satisfied. All other relations which bind us to our fellows, whether physical, or intellectual, or moral, or political, are partial: they are concerned with a part of our complex being, to the exclusion of the rest. But we love another person, not for any one of his relations to us, but for the whole of them together; that is we love him for his own sake, for being what he is. It is not a relation merely of minds, nor of bodies, nor of wills; but of selves: and reciprocal love is the mutual relation of two selves, each of whom depends upon the other. Moreover, as such it is final; an end in itself. All our other relations with our fellows are means to ends; we depend upon them for a purpose, and can explain the reasons for our dependence. But love has no purpose beyond itself. It is its own end. To say that we love a person admits of and requires no explanation. It is a final self-explanatory fact. We cannot get behind it, but we feel that we do not need to get behind it. It is an ultimate satis-

faction in which we rest. Such is the nature of love abstractedly considered, of love as such. But in its concrete manifestation love varies, like all other human functions, with the moral character of the lover. If we love selfishly, with a view to our own satisfaction, rather than that of those whom we love; if we desire to receive and not to give love; we find that we are not satisfied, we do not and cannot receive enough; we turn from one object of love to another, but find each in turn inadequate, and end by becoming disappointed, disillusioned, cynical, disbelievers in the reality of love. But if we love unselfishly—as in its degree all true love does—we not only find that our love expands in range as well as in intensity, but eventually that it expands beyond the powers of finite things to satisfy. Every friend, every object of our love, is, as we have seen, an end in itself; but in so far as it is finite, a relative end, not a thing on which we can ultimately and finally depend. And our love, when once awakened to its own possibilities, seeks more than this; a Being on whom it can completely and permanently depend, a Being above vicissitudes, an absolute Being; union with whom will assure not only to our own love, but to that of all the finite objects of our affection, the reality and stability that we instinctively crave, but could not otherwise attain<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See Note 9.

This may be called a mystical process; but that need not affect its truth: for love, which is a sufficiently recognized fact of experience, is confessedly mystical in all its ways. The point to notice is that the process in question is a fact. It does take place in the human heart; and though it may only be explicit and articulate in a minority of cases, it is by no means confined to that elect minority. On the contrary, it is one of the widest spread and deepest seated instincts of humanity; the desire that love should be permanent, which means rooted in an absolute ground. The pangs of bereavement, the hopes of immortality, and all the pathetic efforts to strain eyes or lift hearts beyond the grave, are witnesses to our insunctive rejection of the thought that love can die. And the necessary implication of that rejection is simply what we have described above.

Nor is this process exclusively Christian. Its first and most famous expression is in Plato, who in his characteristic manner describes it in terms of aesthetic perception. 'The true order,' he says, 'of approaching to the things of love is to use the beauties of earth as steps along which to mount upward to that other beauty, rising from the love of one to the love of two, and from the love of two to the love of all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair deeds, and from fair deeds to fair thoughts, till from fair thoughts he reaches on to



the thoughts of the Uncreated Loveliness, and at last knows what true beauty is.'

Thus far and wide men are led through human love to a desire, in simple language, for the love of God; and that not accidentally, but essentially; by a necessity inherent in the very nature of our personality; the necessity for emotional dependence upon others, which, inasmuch as all other finite beings are themselves dependent, leads us to seek, in an infinite and therefore independent Being, the permanence and security that our love instinctively demands. In fact this immanent dialectic of love is the counterpart of the metaphysical dialectic which establishes the necessity for an absolute Being behind all relative existence. As our reason demands a self-existent Being, to make relative and contingent existence possible, so our love demands an independent Being, on whom it may absolutely depend: but while the former is the demand of one faculty of our being, the latter is the demand of our whole personality. And the mere existence of this great desire in the human heart, grounded as we have seen it to be in the very nature of our personality, must lead all Theists, all who believe the world to be rationally ordered, to infer the probability—many would say the certainty—of its final satisfaction, by the same process of reasoning which, as we have already seen, leads us to expect the ultimate triumph of morality; the argument

that an integral member, and this, within human experience, the highest member of a rational world, cannot be endowed with a constitution whose only issue is in disappointment, but must find a rational answer to its inevitable aspirations and aims.

Thus man in proportion as he is true to the fundamental instinct of his being, in proportion as he lets love lead him where, unless atrophied by selfishness, it irresistibly leads, must desire to love and be beloved by God; and recognizes in this desire a powerful argument for the probability of its satisfaction; while if he perverts the desire by selfishness, the consequent demoralization of his life and character is a strong proof that he is disobeying the true law of his nature. No revelation therefore, which we can possibly conceive, could more adequately fit the facts of human life than Christianity does, with its threefold assurance of the divine love, of the extreme proof of that love in the Incarnation, and of its ever-present manifestation through the divinely constituted human society; while it would account for the fundamental place of love in human nature, as being the necessary impress of the fundamental characteristic of its Creator; who 'made man in His own image' as Christians believe, that 'deep might answer to deep.' And it is thus the content of Christianity, its intrinsic self-evidence, its self-luminous splendour, which at once clinches and confirms all the other

arguments that converge to form its cumulative proof, and explains why that proof is addressed primarily, and why it is rational that it should be addressed primarily, to the emotions and the will, that is to the ultimate root of the personality of man.

Moreover, it will hardly be denied that the great succession of sincere Christians throughout all ages—headed as it is by multitudes, whom even an alien world has recognized as saints—represents the flower of the human race, the highest type of humanity that has yet been realized. And we have seen what their own interpretation of their spiritual history has invariably been. Either therefore these men, with all their insight, misinterpreted their personal experience, and were inferior in judgement to their moral and spiritual inferiors, or their claim to live in the power of Jesus Christ was true, and they are a perpetual witness to each generation of the reality of the Incarnation. And when we say that the heart must be the judge in such a case, we do not mean—as is so often supposed—that the heart unreasonably jumps at the truth of a conclusion, simply because it is beautiful, but that the judgement of our entire personality, when quickened by emotion, has a truer insight than it could otherwise attain, precisely as in the case of friendship quoted above. I trust the integrity of my friend against any adverse appearances, not merely because

I desire it, but because my love has enabled me to see in him what others have not seen, and what I am infallibly sure will justify my trust. So in the case before us, the heart that yearns for communion with God instinctively recognizes in the Christian society an answer to its yearning, feels itself there lifted into a diviner atmosphere, and realizes that the human agency which thus attracts it to God must be—what it has ever claimed to be—God's vicegerent upon earth, but what it has only claimed to be in virtue of its foundation by Jesus Christ as God Incarnate.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE REASONABLENESS OF FAITH

WE have seen in the preceding chapter that the appeal of Christianity to the emotions, and through the emotions to the will, is not an appeal to merely blind feeling, as it is often misrepresented to be, but to emotionally quickened insight. For, to repeat what must be repeated till it is **universally** recognized, the three essential functions of personality, feeling, thought, and will, are inseparable; they never operate in abstract independence of one another, but are all present in every activity of a person, though one may be dominant at a time. And we further saw that, in the case before us, such an appeal was eminently reasonable, since the object of revelation is not to satisfy our speculative curiosity, which would be impossible, but to elicit the practical response of our whole personality; a thing which, constituted as we are, can only be effected by securing our love. Moreover, the content of the revelation itself, that God is love, necessitates this kind of appeal, since love may be believed by the intellect, but cannot be recognized or reciprocated except by the heart;

while, finally, no other revelation, and consequently no other kind of appeal, could have given us ultimate satisfaction. For as our reason demands that the universe should be intelligible, and our will that it should be moral, that morality should be ultimately triumphant, so our entire personality demands that it should be loving, that love should be at the root of it, making it a veritable home.

Now these considerations will throw light upon the reasonableness of the place assigned by Christians to faith in the conduct of life. Christians have been blamed by their opponents, from the time of Celsus downward, for exalting faith above reason, as if in so doing they preferred the less intelligent to the more intelligent guide. But if we recall the distinction, to which attention was drawn in an earlier chapter, between abstract and concrete thinking, it will be remembered that rational certainty, as we there pointed out, is only possible in the case of an abstract subject-matter; while the kind of knowledge which deals with human experience in the concrete, with life as it is actually lived, never admits of exact exposition or logical demonstration; it is not the result of explicit reasoning, and therefore not strictly rationalized or rational. Consequently, all men who deal with human life in the concrete—statesmen, soldiers, physicians, lawyers, merchants, financiers—habitually employ a kind of knowledge which cannot be

reduced to rule. This knowledge may include within its compass many of the results of abstract science, but it goes beyond those results into a region where, as we have seen, the reasoning powers are qualified and quickened by emotional and volitional influences, and in which personal idiosyncrasy and character play an important part. Its method is intuition rather than demonstration, and its result probability, which cannot at the utmost rise higher than moral certainty. Now Christianity is of this latter class. It deals with man in the concrete, as an active agent who has to realize himself in the experience of life. And, moreover, it deals with him more completely in the concrete than any other influence can do; for it involves not one or more departments of his life, but his entire personality in all its relations; his internal relations of thought, feeling, and will; his external relations to the material world as well as to his fellow men, and his relation to God, in which all else is comprised—man in his entire context.

We have seen, moreover, that this indefinite character of concrete thought is due to the fact that man's actual context or environment, the context or environment in relation to which he has daily to live and act, is far larger and more complex than he can rationally grasp, its fringes passing away on every side into the unknown. Hence he is obliged to act largely upon faith or trust, even in the most

ordinary affairs of life. A man makes a simple engagement for the morrow, in the way of society or business, in the confident expectation of being able to keep it. But this involves a trust in his state of health, a trust perhaps in the state of the weather, a trust that a number of heavily-worked railway servants will do their duty, a trust that his friends or correspondents will keep their part of the mutual compact. There is not an atom of rational certainty about any of these things, and yet it is reasonable on the ground of past experience to assume their probability, and would be unreasonable to doubt it. And so life is carried on. We act on trust from morning to night; trust in the laws of nature, trust in the competence of our teachers or advisers, trust in the integrity of our commercial correspondents, trust in the love of our friends. So continuous and universal, indeed, is the process, that we are habitually unaware of its true nature, unless perhaps reminded of it by a breach of the continuity, a disappointment of our trust, a railway accident, a shipwreck, the sudden discovery of a fraud. But all this trust is, of course, not blind trust. It is, as we say, guided by experience, that is by such concrete knowledge as each man has been able to acquire. And upon the degree and quality of that knowledge depends the value of the trust. A man of wide experience, critically tested, knows whom and what to trust,



and is proportionately successful in life ; while an ignorant or indolent man, who has verified no knowledge for himself, can trust only on the authority of others, which he has no ability to test, and runs a corresponding risk of erroneous thought and action.

Hence it will be obvious that Christian faith is only a particular application of what is the universal and inevitable law of human life. It is trust resting upon concrete knowledge in relation to religion. Man's religious context or environment, if one may so describe it, is God—God who is infinitely above his utmost faculties of comprehension, and remains, even after revelation, beyond the limits of that revelation, unknown. If therefore we are to live in relation to God it must obviously be by faith or trust, similar in kind to, though greater in degree than, that which we repose in nature or our fellow men.

But this faith or trust, like all other trust, must ultimately rest on knowledge. And the characteristics of that knowledge have been described above. It will be possessed in different degrees by the religiously educated child, by the humble-minded man who trusts his teachers from a perception of their worth, by the philosopher who has weighed all the cumulative evidence that exists, by the saint whose mystic experience soars beyond power of words to tell. But it will always be of

that complex kind, in which the whole personality takes part, and in which the intellectual judgement is conditioned by the affections and the will—the affections that love goodness, and in consequence desire God, and in consequence are sensitive to every faintest intimation of His presence; and the will that, by persistent effort, has translated those affections into character—that higher moral character from which spiritual insight springs.

Christians then will have different degrees of knowledge according to their personal capacity, and history, and stage of development; but the content of that knowledge will be the same, that God is love, and that the Incarnation with its atoning efficacy is the supreme revelation of that love, and the Christian society its present manifestation upon earth: and Christian faith is the trust founded on this knowledge. The life of faith therefore is the life that trusts the love of God, and habitually acts upon that trust; viewing the moral law as God's commandment, and the order of the world as God's providence, and the Christian society as God's earthly agent, and prayer as communion with God.

It will be obvious therefore that no rational objection can be made against this life, simply on the ground that it is a life of trust. For all life, as we have seen, is and must be carried on upon

trust. The wisest man in existence is obliged to exercise as much trust as the simplest; and the two only differ in the kind of knowledge that lies behind their trust. There can be no possible objection therefore to the rationality of the Christian life, on the ground that it is a life of faith, since all life is in similar case.

But there is a further objection connected with faith, which may at first sight look more plausible. Faith or trust as we saw, in order to be rational, must be grounded on previous knowledge. Now in the case of Christianity this previous knowledge is taught in the form of authorized dogma; taught upon authority; in other words, the knowledge itself is made a matter of faith, and therefore is not knowledge. Hence, it is urged, the Christian life of faith does not rest upon a rational basis. But after what we have been saying, the answer to this objection will not be far to seek. First, we must distinguish between the Christian knowledge or belief as possessed by the Christian society at large, and forming the content of the general Christian consciousness, and the same knowledge or belief as taught by the society to fresh individuals. The body of Christian doctrine claims, as we have seen, to rest on experience—the experience of the first disciples of Jesus Christ, as to what He said and did—handed down by the Christian society and corroborated by the existence

and character of that society as a fact of present experience ; while the presupposition of it all is Theism and the accumulated arguments which make for Theism, and through Theism for the probability of a revelation ; and the means of its apprehension is not any single faculty, but that concrete judgement in which the entire personality and character concurs. In other words, the body of Christian doctrine rests as much on evidence and argument as any other theory of the universe which has ever invited the attention of men. This is only a restatement of all that our previous chapters have gone to show. But the business of the Christian society is to teach this body of doctrine at least in outline to the world ; which means not only to the wise and understanding, but to the young, the ignorant, the simple, and to hearts and minds and consciences dulled and distorted in their action by sin. How can this be done but by stating the essential facts of Christianity as facts, that is teaching them dogmatically ; dogma, as we saw above, being abbreviated history compendiously expressed. In all other teaching this is the method pursued. We teach all matters of fact, upon simple authority ; and the majority of men to the end of life hold nearly all their beliefs and opinions, and the most highly educated minority many of their strongest convictions, upon one kind of authority or another. And in no case is this more

obvious than in the matter of science. A man of average cultivation believes an immense number of scientific facts, many of which perhaps vitally affect his modes of thought, and yet none of which he has ever verified or could ever verify for himself. They have been dogmatically taught him upon the ultimate authority of specialists, and he is content, and justifiably content, with the fact. But truths thus taught, it may be argued, are beyond dispute, which is not the case with articles of religious belief. It is not the dogmatic method that is objectionable, but its application to a doubtful subject-matter. To say this, however, is simply to beg the question at issue. For to the Christian teacher, speaking as the exponent of the common Christian consciousness, the central articles of his religion are not doubtful at all, but as fully established as any of the facts of science, though in a different kind of way. And convinced of the truth of his facts, and of their supreme importance to the world, the Christian teacher is guilty of no confusion of thought in delivering them dogmatically, but is acting with perfect reason. He will of course enforce them by argument where argument is possible ; but with the young and ignorant and simple this is not the case. And if this dogmatic teaching creates a bias in many minds that may afterwards operate in its own favour, this is precisely what a Christian would desire. For the Christian society

believes itself to be the instrument through which God is gathering human beings into closer union with Himself ; and the result and not the method of this ingathering is the important point. It is the heart and will that need to be secured ; and the self-evidence of Christianity, dogmatically stated, is in many cases more effective in attaining this result than the most elaborate appeal to the reason.

For after all the work of the Christian society is not simply to teach the fact that a revelation has been made, nor even the character of that revelation, but to bring the revelation itself home to the hearts and minds of men ; and this it does by so presenting the fact that it may work for itself, and become indeed a fresh revelation to each individual. This is the picture that we meet with in the Acts of the Apostles. Men are moved by preaching and exhortation to a suitable predisposition, but their actual conversion to Christianity is always represented as due to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. This may act in various ways ; by investing the preacher with a magnetic persuasiveness that transcends his natural powers ; or by investing his message with a luminosity that makes it self-evident ; by carrying a supernatural assurance of pardon to the despondent sinner ; or a supernatural conviction of truth to the perplexed thinker ; or a supernatural vision of holiness to the soul that has hitherto sought it in vain. But in all cases it

is represented as the gift of God—a gift conditional on the predisposition of the receiver—but still a gift and not a discovery; a direct interposition from the divine side, an action of the divine upon the human nature. And this has been the theory of all Christian teaching, from the apostolic age to our own. It has not been the tradition of an intellectual system which men might critically accept or reject; but the transmission of contact with a living power, whose vivifying influence they might feel, like a magnetic current, in themselves. Every art of emotional persuasiveness, or intellectual conviction, or personal influence has in its turn been used, as needed, to commend the Christian message. But the essence of the message simply is the existence of this free gift of God; that it can be had for the asking; that God is desirous to give Himself to men if they will only accept Him. And the word ‘grace,’ that has long grown so technical, as to be practically meaningless, and round which so many controversies have arisen to confuse the heart and head, is simply, in its original employment, a concise statement that God’s gift is free. And from this point of view we may say that to be a Christian is not merely to be a believer in Christian doctrine or a doer of Christian duty, but to adopt the receptive attitude of one who lives not by his own power, but by that of the grace or free gift of the Spirit of God. This is the meaning of

educated classes of society; for a very similar influence is exercised over the less educated by a different cause, and that is the increased development of urban life. There is a sense in which it is intensely true that 'God made the country, and man made the town.' For the dweller in the country lives in the constant presence of things which, to say the least, he did not himself create—the flowers, the trees, the birds, the animal and insect life, sunset and moonrise, and starlight and rainbow, and the falling of the dew, 'fire and hail, snow and vapour, wind and storm.' And whether he attributes all this wonder and beauty to nature or to God, he cannot but realize around him, every moment of the day, the working of a 'power which is not himself,' and upon which his existence depends. But in the town it is otherwise. There, from morning to night, man sees nothing but the objects of his own creation—his streets, his fabrics, his inventions, his means of locomotion, his pageants, his works of art, his places of amusement, and all the manifold appliances of artificial life. His creatorship is everywhere in evidence, while the reminders of his creatureship are few and far between, and the 'power that is not himself,' upon which he most obviously depends, is the massive power of the collective humanity around him, whether for evil or for good.

Now of course there is nothing in either the



scientific temper or the urban life to affect the truths of natural religion in any way, but there is obviously a great deal to affect our appreciation of them, by thus removing them from sight. We are at the farthest pole from that Eastern temper, in which religion had its rise.

‘My own East!

How nearer God we were! He glows above  
With scarce an intervention, presses close  
And palpitatingly, His soul o’er ours!  
We feel Him, not by painful reason know!  
The everlasting minute of creation  
Is felt there; now it is, as it was then;  
All changes at His instantaneous will,  
Not by the operation of a law  
Whose maker is elsewhere at other work.’

Moreover, any serious belief in God carries with it a belief in His relation to ourselves. The moral law becomes His personal commandment, and the circumstances of life His providential rule. And this belief inevitably influences the conduct of its possessor in a way that, in turn, reacts upon the belief itself, strengthening and confirming it as time goes on. While conversely, if the belief in question, without being deliberately rejected, is yet in total abeyance, it misses all this practical corroboration which the conduct of life would otherwise afford; and thus the man, who without disbelieving in God yet forgets His existence, must lose, with every

the childlike mind which is so emphasized in the Gospels; it is the receptive attitude which looks up to Another, for the protection and guidance of life; which lives in conscious dependence upon Another. And the Christian revelation is the revelation that this is the truly human life. It is the invitation to men to try the experiment of trusting God. 'If you will accept Christianity,' it says, 'you will find by experience that it is true.' It is obvious therefore that, in the last resort, what is thus offered for acceptance must be offered as a fact; that is, dogmatically offered. And hence to object to dogmatic teaching is really to object to the teaching of a revelation as a revelation. For a revelation must be primarily presented as a fact, and nothing else, however much it may be subsequently commended or defended by evidence and argument. There is therefore, in the last analysis, no essential difference between the young or simple Christian, who lives on the strength of what he has been dogmatically taught, and the wise or learned, who has examined the evidence for himself. The spiritual insight of the former is more instinctive and emotional; that of the latter more explicit and intellectual. But both alike accept as a fact what requires such insight for its acceptance; and both alike in consequence lead the life of faith or trust.

We have urged the reasonableness of that life,

on the obvious ground of its similarity to our ordinary conduct—our daily and hourly trust in nature and mankind. But the case admits of stronger putting, for a deeper analysis will show that this similarity is due to kinship; and that trust in God is really the presupposition of all lesser trust; that the latter implies the former, and is only justified because the former is true.

It should be comparatively easy to see this in the case of the material world. We can do nothing, as noticed above, without trusting the laws of nature, that the sun will rise to-morrow, and the seasons return in their due course, and things continue to behave in the future as we have known them to do in the past. But this means, not that we have a separate trust of detail by detail, but a general belief that the universe is a rationally ordered whole. And this, for the majority of thinkers in all ages, has implied, without more ado, that it is ruled by a universal reason or mind. Nor does our habitual unconsciousness of this implication alter the fact that it is potentially present, whenever we make an act of trust in any natural law, when the farmer sows his seed, or the sailor puts to sea, or the chemist makes an experiment, or the astronomer a calculation. In every case the universal is the presupposition of the particular trust. We trust the part because we trust the whole.

But the same is the case, though in a less obvious and somewhat more complicated degree, when we trust our fellow men. Of course our fellow men are not always nor wholly to be trusted, and there are cynics who in consequence adopt a policy of habitual distrust. But it is not thus that the normal life and business of the world is carried on. As a general rule, we trust and are obliged to trust our fellows, every hour that we live; and only so is social conduct and social progress possible. And what does this trust imply? Belief in the average morality of mankind—that the ordinary man may be depended on to perform the duties of his station. And that this belief is justified, the whole course of civilization is a proof. But what again does this morality imply? It implies the continuous and progressive action of moral force in the world; the moral force which, despite all the opposing elements in human nature, has slowly raised the standard of public opinion, and educated or coerced the individual into conformity with that standard as it gradually rose. And whence this moral force? It is the accumulated result, at any given period, of all the previous actions of the moral law, the categorical imperative, upon the wills of mankind; embodying at once the energy of all bygone prophets and reformers, and the momentum which their efforts have imparted to the duller mass of ordinary men. And what is the categorical im-

faith is not without its counterpart in the lesser lives of trust. The man who in dealing with the forces of nature fears to embark upon the unknown, and is ever ready to suspect 'a lion in the way,' is a moral and practical failure. Whereas he who dares greatly, which means that he trusts greatly, whether as a navigator, or explorer, or scientific investigator, or inventor, is the morally successful and the practically useful man. And the same is the case with social trustfulness. The man who regulates his life on the principle that other men are not to be trusted may attain a certain selfish security thereby; but he infallibly ruins his own moral character by maintaining such an attitude, he paralyses his capacity for the service of mankind, and he reacts disastrously in countless ways upon the character of those whom he suspects. He becomes personally contemptible and socially destructive. Whereas he who errs on the side of trustfulness, though he may often be deceived, has not only himself a higher moral character for the fact, but also reacts morally upon others, not uncommonly creating in them by his confidence virtues which they did not previously possess; while as an agent in the world, a mover of men, a benefactor of others, he is incontestably supreme. And one may note also the further case in which distrust of nature or mankind, when pushed to its extreme, disturbs the mental as well as the moral

life, and is a common accompaniment, whether as cause or effect, of insanity, while it disappears again when sanity is recovered.

All these facts point in the same direction. Trustfulness is an essential element in the moral life; it is in harmony with the moral law, and therefore, for Theists, with the will of God; and all the minor kinds of trust that we have described derive their ethical character from the fact that they imply, when analysed, reliance upon God, as the orderer of nature and the controller of human affairs. God is the presupposition which alone justifies the life of trust. Trust is a rational attitude because it means dependence upon God.

Briefly, then, to recapitulate: man is not only a thinking being, but a living agent whose every action is a step forward into the unknown. As such he cannot be guided exclusively by sense or reason, for he cannot perceive the future, or argue from premisses which he does not possess. He must and does habitually act upon faith or trust. But this faith to be reasonable must be grounded on previous experience, that is, on the action of sense and reason in the past. But such experience would be no ground for faith if its content were chaotic. It is only a ground for faith because it discloses order in the universe, and the better a man understands that order the surer and safer are his acts of trust. The Christian has come to

believe that order to be ultimately based on love, and this is his distinction from other men. He does not really differ from them because he lives by faith, but because he lives by the particular faith that 'God is love.' Hence the objections which are urged against the Christian life of faith, as being unreasonable, are really directed against the belief on which it rests, the question with which our previous chapters have dealt; while, on the other hand, the moral value which Christians attach to faith arises mainly from the fact that the belief or knowledge which it involves cannot be attained without that spiritual insight which can only be acquired by a spiritual life<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See Note 10.

## CHAPTER XII

### CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

WE have indicated above the kind of evidence on which a Christian believes that God is love. But it remains to consider how Christianity meets the one great difficulty to that belief, the existence of sin and suffering in the world.

To begin with, sin and suffering must not be crudely massed together as if they constituted one complex blot upon creation; a way in which they are often treated by the opponents of religion. Sin and suffering are two perfectly distinct and easily distinguishable things. And suffering is as a simple fact of experience, without importing any theory into the question, both a consequence and a corrective of sin. So much of the worst suffering in the world can be immediately traced to sin either in the individual or the race as to suggest the probability that all of it may be in similar case; while, on the other hand, this same suffering that is consequent upon sin tends in various ways to counteract and correct it. The problem of suffering, therefore, is a conditional problem—conditional upon sin. Had there been no sin in the



world, there might, for all that we can tell, have been no suffering ; and moreover, in a world where sin exists, suffering is far from being an unmitigated evil<sup>1</sup>. Sin therefore constitutes the real problem. How could a God of love call into being a creature who should sin? This indeed is a question upon which nothing new can be said ; but it is also a question round which so many misconceptions have gathered and into which so many unauthorized assumptions have been imported, that it may be worth our while briefly to reconsider it.

In the first place, it should be noticed that when the question is stated in the above abstract form, it suggests the inference that God cannot be loving, or if loving cannot be Almighty—an inference that in all ages has been urged. But it is not in this abstract form that the Christian can view the problem. For he has his presuppositions—on the one hand all the evidence of beneficent design in creation, including the great argument from the beauty of the world ; and on the other hand the Incarnation, with the ability that it has given men practically to overcome sin. A Christian cannot get rid of these things ; they are a part of the present content of his consciousness, a part of his actual world. Believing then that there is much independent evidence of God's love in the constitution of the world, and, further, that God

<sup>1</sup> See *Lux Mundi*, Essay iii.

has shown Himself desirous and able to rescue man from sin, and, further, that in the method of that rescue He has given us the most consummate proof of love, a Christian can no longer ask the old doubtful question in its old doubtful form. He cannot admit that the existence of sin disproves the love of God; but can only ask the modified question, 'Why did a loving God create man capable of sinning, and therefore, as the event has proved, practically sure to sin?' To this question the Christian revelation gives no speculative answer. The Gnostics, indeed, in the second century attempted to interpolate into Christianity various theories of the origin of evil; but their speculations were decisively rejected by the Church. And more orthodox thinkers have endeavoured at various times and in various ways to throw light upon the problem; by suggesting, for instance, that evil is merely a negation, without substantive existence; or that it is a necessity of finite and relative being; or yet, again, that partial evil may be universal good. But none of these or other similar conjectures really illuminate the question. Probably its solution would involve the knowledge of things which we could not at present comprehend<sup>1</sup>; while certainly it is a thing which by the very fact of our sin we have ceased to deserve. And in the absence of such speculative knowledge, all that

<sup>1</sup> See Note 11.

we can say is that we cannot conceive how free-will could have been otherwise created. If a finite being was to be endowed with free-will, he must have the power of misusing it; and in the light of history we may add that he inevitably would misuse it. Or, in other words, God must have known when creating man that, as a fact, he would sin; and to this extent his sin was practically inevitable; inevitable, not because the possibility of it necessarily implies the actuality of it, but because God must have known in what direction the possibility would act. But free-will is the source of all morality, of all that has worth or value in the world. Without it there would be no heroism, no idealism, no beauty of holiness, no self-sacrificing love; man would have remained an animal, and history moved forward to the goal. Human life therefore—with all that it stands for—could not have come into being without the possibility of sin; and we have no evidence for supposing that such a possibility could have had any other issue than as a matter of fact it had.

And this brings us to the consideration of the incompatibility which is often mistakenly supposed to exist between the theory of evolution, with its picture of the gradual rise of man from an animal ancestry, and the Christian doctrine of man's fall. Now, strictly speaking, the theory of evolution is a theory of the method in

which the universe has attained its present condition, but in no way a theory of its origin. Evolution is simply a process or method ; which may be combined with any theory of origin. It was combined by some of its earlier advocates with a materialistic theory of origin, and supposed to make materialism more intelligible. But materialism has been refuted by all sound philosophy, as often as it has reappeared ; while the conception of a materialistic evolution of the entire universe is absolutely unthinkable, and contradicts that very conviction of rational causation in the world upon which the whole of science depends. Such an evolution can be expressed in words, but it cannot be construed into thought. With this use of the theory of evolution, therefore, as an aid to resuscitate materialism, Christianity has nothing whatever to do. But evolution may also be and has also been combined with a Theistic view of the world's origin, as being the method or one of the methods that God has employed in creation ; and in this form Christianity is quite ready to accept it, as far as it can be scientifically proved. What then has the theory of evolution, so understood, to say of man ? Merely that his bodily organism was developed from an animal ancestry ; and that, in consequence, when his mental and moral faculties were so enlarged as to become human, while the physical traits of his

animality remained strong within him, he must inevitably fall into moral evil, as part of the very process of his ascent to higher things. But it should be noticed that the enlargement of faculty and the commission of evil are two separate things; and that the former, not the latter, is the cause of man's rise in the scale of being. He does not rise by wrong-doing, but the sudden accession of new faculties by which he does rise is morally certain, under his circumstances, to lead him into wrong. Still the wrong-doing is not the condition, but the practically inevitable concomitant of his rise.

But there is nothing in this incompatible with the Christian doctrine of the fall of man, which simply asserts that the first human beings sinned, and transmitted an hereditary tendency to sin to their offspring; who have all likewise sinned, and the more easily on account of this original taint: while when Christians speculate upon the subject at all, they arrive as we have seen at a very similar conclusion to the evolutionist, though by another line of thought; namely, that in endowing man with reason and free-will God endowed him with faculties that might be misused, and must have known, in so doing, that he would in fact misuse them; and that, in this sense, his fall was the practically inevitable consequence of his spiritual elevation above the animal world.

In saying this we are of course implying that many things which have been frequently taught as part of the doctrine of the Fall are unjustifiable accretions. The account in Genesis is obviously mythological in form ; and therefore, as in the case of all myth, it is impossible to say how much literal history it may include ; though as ideal history, as a description, that is, of the progress and consequence of sin, it is unapproached, and unapproachable in literature. But even taken in its most literal sense, it tells us no more than that the first human being sinned, and that sorrow and shame was the immediate result. The Paradisiacal state of innocence, on which subsequent critics have so often delighted to enlarge, the imputation of guilt to Adam's offspring, as distinct from a sinful heredity, the necessary connexion of physical death with sin, and other such opinions at which criticism stumbles, are wholly unwarranted by the account in question.

On the question therefore of the origin of evil in human nature, the Christian doctrine of the Fall only states categorically what reason acting on experience would naturally suggest ; and its supposed conflict with science is only, as we have seen always to be the case, a conflict between unwarrantable theories that have been read by their respective advocates into each.

But, again, the Christian conviction that, despite

His creation of a being who would sin, God is \*love, depends mainly, as we saw, upon belief in the Incarnation in its atoning aspect. God could permit sin, because He intended to overcome it. And if we were sure that in the end sin was to be completely abolished, when men had learned 'by the means of evil that good is best,' such assurance would go far to remove any difficulty respecting its primary permission. But we are met by the objection that, so far from having any such assurance, Christians are committed to a belief in everlasting punishment ; which implies final impenitence or the everlasting continuance of sinful wills. And this is indeed one of the strongest arguments urged against Christianity, the incompatibility between its view of God and its belief in hell.

What then are the real facts of the case? Christian thinkers have held, broadly speaking, three views upon the subject. First, that the impenitent would be punished everlastingly—the popular conception of hell ; secondly, that the impenitent would be annihilated and immortal life be conditional on union with Christ—the doctrine of conditional immortality ; thirdly, that all men would finally be converted to God—

'And God unmake but to remake the soul

He else made first in vain which must not be'—

the doctrine of universalism. Now two points

should be noticed about these three opinions. In the first place, they have, as an historical fact, all been held within the compass of the Christian Church, and by men who were equally devout Christians ; and, in the face of this undoubted fact, it is impossible to maintain that any one doctrine on the subject is exclusively Christian. Independent thinkers in all ages have felt themselves free to speculate upon the subject—without prejudice to the completeness of their Christian faith—that is to say they have believed it to be an open question.

And in the second place, this would not have been the case but for the fact that all the thinkers in question can quote isolated passages of the New Testament in their support. This is not equivalent to saying that these views are explicitly represented there, but that there are passages which, on the face of them, appear to favour each of the three views. Reading these sets of passages with one theory already in mind, as most men do, we instinctively accommodate the remaining two to this one ; we read it into them, and think that we find it there. But an unbiassed consideration will easily show us that the same method may be equally applied by supporters of either of the alternative views.

Taking the New Testament as a whole, therefore, we do not, on the face of it, find any one of the views in question explicitly and consistently



maintained, while each of the three seems in one place or another to be implied. The practical sinfulness of sin is everywhere emphasized, but its ultimate issue still remains veiled in the awful obscurity with which it has ever oppressed the human mind, and which is itself perhaps, like a haunting conscience, part of the penalty of sin.

It may reasonably be maintained therefore in the face of these two facts—the diversity of Christian thinkers, and the absence of explicit definition in the New Testament—that no one eschatological doctrine can be so identified with Christianity as to furnish a ground for its rejection.

But even if we incline to the belief in everlasting punishment, on the ground of its long and wide prevalence in the Church, we must distinguish between punishment and torment. The horrible pictures of everlasting torment, which mediaeval Christianity shares with various other religions, are a startling witness of man's judgement on himself—of the awful possibilities which he sees in unrepented sin; but they are pagan in origin, and have not a shred of justification in the pages of the New Testament. They belong to rougher ages than our own; when cruelty was so common a human attribute as not to seem incompatible with the character of God; and their rejection, in the present day, is due to that gradual elevation of our moral standard which has been the constant

work of the Christian Spirit in the world. But we can conceive of a punishment that shall be everlasting, without doing violence to our sense of divine justice. For we have an analogy for it within the limits of this life. Take the case of a man who has been a culpable spendthrift, in his youth, and so reduced himself to penury for the remainder of his life. His poverty is his punishment, and as long as he resents it he is in misery; but no sooner does he recognize its justice, than he can bear it with cheerful acquiescence, as God's will. Yet the punishment remains; he has all the incapacities of poverty, and can never now do the good that he might have done with his wealth. This is a simple instance of what is daily occurring when we look behind the scenes of life. Men are being perpetually punished by the life-long consequences of their sins; but if they accept the punishment as punishment, it ceases to be pain; for they become in Dante's language 'content within the fire.'

Now one can conceive a similar process in the future life; that men may there wake to recognize that, by their earthly conduct, they have brought themselves for ever to a lower state than might have been, and are to that extent everlastingly punished, while yet they accept their condition as divinely just, and are at peace.

It may be objected that, as implying a universal

acceptance of God's will, this view is equivalent to universalism. But it retains the conception of punishment; and it is with that, and not with impenitence, that we are concerned. Holding that everlasting punishment was implied in the New Testament, men have gone on to infer that this would involve everlasting impenitence—the perpetuity of sinful wills, with all the speculative difficulty that such a notion creates. But since punishment is as compatible with penitence as with impenitence, we can at least conceive a doctrine of punishment, as above, which shall continue to be real punishment, and yet not offend our moral sense; since it would mean that all men were finally apportioned the place in the universe which they had chosen for themselves, by showing themselves, to God's unerring insight, incapable of higher things.

But our present object is not to press this, any more than either of its alternative possibilities, but rather to emphasize the undoubted coexistence of all the three views, within the compass of the Christian consciousness, as proving that there is no clear revelation upon the subject. The language in which it is treated, in the New Testament, is mainly symbolical; and inevitably so, from the very nature of the case; since the condition of existence to which it refers is wholly beyond our present experience, and therefore beyond our power

of understanding. And though the possibilities which it suggests are very grave, the interpretation of those possibilities is left obscure; while the particular exaggeration of them that offends our sense of justice is, as we have seen, a human invention; which, though a powerful witness to the haunting terrors with which sin afflicts the natural man, has no right to be regarded as a divine revelation.

Meanwhile, Christians themselves have two alleviating considerations to bear in mind; first, that the very darkest possibilities, which the New Testament can suggest, are part and parcel of the same revelation which assures them that God is love, and must therefore admit of an interpretation which may be ultimately recognized as compatible with that love; and, secondly, that Christ continually employs human analogies to illustrate the character and dealings of God, in a way to imply that the highest human morality is homogeneous with the divine; and hence that the true verdict of our sense of justice—when we are hereafter sufficiently enlightened to make that verdict true—must in the event be justified, and not confounded. And it is on the strength of these considerations that sincere Christians face the future with confidence; not from any shallow optimism, but as a part of their life of faith, or trust in God.

Thus then, as regards the speculative question

of the end of evil, no less than that of its origin, many theories have been imported into popular Christianity, which form no part of its real revelation, and should not be allowed therefore to create a prejudice against it.

But while Christianity thus gives no special sanction to speculations on the origin or end of evil, it does lay exceptional emphasis upon the actual fact of sin. No other religion or philosophy has attached such importance to the consideration of sin. For while most if not all other systems have endeavoured in one way or another to evade the extremity of its pressure, Christianity alone has maintained that sin is the radical disease of man, and, as such, his primary and cardinal concern ; no true development of his faculties and capacities, no true realization of his destiny being possible, except on the condition of its removal ; and this because, in the last analysis, the seat of sin is the will. It is man's own doing, and he is responsible for it, as being the misuse of his free-will. But this again is in strict accordance with the verdict of experience. For every commonly honest man knows the difference between temptation and consent. Hereditary infirmity, defective education, immoral environment, or any other cause external to his personal will, may tempt a man to act amiss, but they do not necessitate his action. The temptation may often be so strong, and the qualification

for resistance so imperfect, as very much to modify our condemnation of particular sinners. But however much this may be the case, the distinction remains between temptation and consent—the external condition of evil, and its internal acceptance by the will. Now the will, as we have seen, is the self. What a man wills, he is. His will is the very centre and mainspring of his being. And if man is universally sinful, and the organ of his sin is his will, then man is radically other than he ought to be, diseased at the root of his personality, out of his true order, lawless, fallen.

It is on this actual condition of man, as a fact of experience, that the Christian doctrine of the Fall lays stress. And it is not in the account which it gives of sin, but in this emphasis which it lays upon it, that the peculiarity of that doctrine consists. It is the assertion of the central—the absolutely central—significance of sin in human personality, and of the consequent intensity of man's need of redemption from its power. It is the call to man not to deceive himself, but to look his sin fully in the face, as the only condition of getting rid of it. And it is to man thus convinced of sin that the Christian atonement appeals, with its assurance of forgiveness, and its assistance to renewal of life. On the means of that forgiveness and renewal we need not now dwell, but simply on its practical result. The Christian religion has, in every gene-

ration, raised its sincere adherents from sin to sanctity, in a way with which, as we have noticed in a previous chapter, no other power in the world can compare. And through these elect agents it has reacted on the world at large, gradually raising its moral standard, and thereby elevating the tone of all its other activities—art, science, literature, law; domestic, social, and political development; slowly but successfully creating Christendom, and the spiritual progress that Christendom implies.

While declining therefore to satisfy man's speculative curiosity about evil, which does not really need and perhaps would not at present admit of satisfaction, Christianity does satisfy his real need, which is practical; by enabling all its sincere adherents progressively to overcome the evil in themselves, and by so doing to weaken its influence in the world. This, as we have seen, is one of the strongest evidences that Christianity is what it claims to be; and an evidence of which Christians, as a rule, feel the force, more fully than other men; because they have looked their sin more truly in the face, and recognized in the fact that it is their own disease, the result of their own sinful will, a proof that they cannot of themselves overcome it; and that the only power, therefore, which can enable them to do so must come from a sinless will, which as sinless, must be more than human. Thus the seriousness of the Christian view of sin

is not only the essential condition of our overcoming it, but also the essential condition of our rightly estimating the nature of the power by which it is overcome; while, on the other hand, all theories of the world, or systems of belief, which on any ground attempt to minimize the sinfulness of sin, fail utterly in their attempt to remove it.

Now of the world as we know it human character and conduct is an integral and an important part, not merely because it interests ourselves, but because it possesses that quality of value or worth to which we have so often alluded; this being one of those categories under which by our mental constitution we are compelled to regard things. A moral action has more worth than a chemical reaction or an animal caprice—a judgement which we translate into practice by our habitual subordination of the animal world to our use. As Kant says, there is no good thing, a good will only excepted. And humanity which possesses this worth is in no way separable from the rest of the universe, but intimately one with it. Consequently all the inferior forces that we see around us, mechanical, chemical, vegetable, and animal, whatever purposes they may subserve elsewhere, culminate, as far as this world is concerned, in the moral character of man.

No philosophy therefore, no attempt to understand the meaning of the universe, can approve itself to us, unless it justifies man's conviction of



his own worth as a moral being. For if the world is a rational order, human life must be a part of that order, and man's desire for spiritual development therefore be ultimately satisfied. And on this ground, apart from the other difficulties in which they are involved, both materialism and pantheism fail, as speculative explanations of the universe, no less than as practical solutions of the problem of human life. For they are both compelled to treat the facts of man's moral consciousness as delusions. But if these were delusions, all our other faculties which are inseparably blent with these would be delusions too; the world whose culminating product was thus an untruth would not be a rationally ordered world; and science would therefore become impossible—which, in the face of all that it has accomplished, is manifestly absurd; while, by denying man's personal responsibility for his own moral failure, these systems deny the very fact whose clear recognition is the necessary presupposition of his amendment and progress, and thus paralyse his practical life. Theism is open to neither of these objections; but Theism apart from Revelation still leaves the problem of man's moral life unsolved. But with Christianity the case is different. Christianity was the historic outcome of the purest Theism in the earlier world; and is, as we have seen, the natural climax to which Theism logically leads. While

thus claiming to be the most definite and consistent form of Theism, it includes the positive elements of truth which both materialism and pantheism contain. For it teaches that the material world is intimately connected with the development and manifestation of all our spiritual life; and that it is so as being the organ of the omnipresent Spirit of God, in whom we live and move and have our being. And finally, it throws a light upon the significance and destiny of human life, which satisfies the demands of our moral consciousness and inspires a hope that makes progress possible.

Considered therefore in the abstract, Christianity affords us a more complete and comprehensive explanation of the world than any other scheme of religion or system of philosophy can give. But it does more than this; for it does not remain abstract. It offers a proof that its explanation is true. For it bids us look sin in the face, till we see how incurable it is by any human agency, and yet how its cure is the one thing needful, and then Christianity undertakes to cure it. We need not enlarge again upon the fact that it has done so, through the ages, for all who have sincerely accepted the conditions of their cure. But we would point to the evidential value of the fact. The Christian religion claims to be a revelation of truths about God and man, which we can see to be eminently reasonable, but cannot adequately

test; and in connexion with those truths and as a result of them it promises to perform 'a mighty work' in us, a moral miracle; and the more we analyse the nature of that work and of the forces which oppose it, the more clearly we see that the only power which can accomplish it must be divine. But a coherent system which can be tested in one point, and that a crucial point, and there found true, must logically be presumed to be true in all other respects. Thus the age-long moral miracle of the conquest of sin, when we measure the extent of the field over which it has worked and is still working, clinches for us all the other arguments in favour of Christianity. And if it be true, if God has really given us this practical proof of His love for sinners, we can afford to wait in confidence for a fuller solution of the problem of evil, secure that, when it comes, it will be found compatible with the fact that God is love.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CONCLUSION

THE object of the foregoing pages has been to call attention to certain points and principles of Christian Evidence, which are of much wider application than any which is given to them in the book itself; in the hope that they may be of use in some of the current controversies to which I have barely done more than allude. But as far as I have drawn any conclusion from them, it may perhaps be summarized as follows:—

Christianity is primarily a practical appeal to the practice of men, and as such especially addressed through their emotions to their will. But it also inevitably involves an intellectual view of the universe, which covers the ground of philosophy, and prescribes the outlines within which philosophy must move. It is thus incidentally a philosophy, as well as essentially a religion; it provides us, that is to say, with an explanation of that ultimate meaning of the world, which it is the constant object of philosophy to seek. Consequently when the truth of Christianity

is questioned, it must be viewed in its philosophical, as well as its religious aspect ; its total bearing upon the problem of thought, as well as upon the practice of life. And Christians in every age have maintained that, when thus regarded as a whole, Christianity is immeasurably more reasonable than any other scheme or system of conduct and thought. Its truth does not admit of rational demonstration ; because such demonstration is only possible in the case of an abstract subject-matter, or one which is artificially isolated from its context. Whereas it is of the essence of Christianity to include human nature in its entire context ; its full and concrete reality, with all the complex relations which that reality involves. When therefore we say that it is more reasonable than any of its rivals, we mean that it commends itself, as more probable, to that concrete judgement in which all the faculties of our personality concur. And the evidence, on which this judgement operates to-day, is substantially the same as that on which the Fathers relied, when they were first formulating the intellectual expression of the Christian creed. That evidence is, broadly speaking, three-fold ; being partly philosophical, partly historical, partly present in our contemporary experience of our own age. First, there is the speculative consideration that the universe points to idealism and idealism to Theism, and Theism to a revela-

tion, and revelation to an Incarnation. Then there is the nature of the historic facts recorded in the Gospels, and applied in the Epistles, together with the character of those documents themselves. And lastly there is the living society, with which we are in present contact, claiming to be lineally descended from the men who first witnessed the Incarnation, and continuing their work in the world to-day ; with the significant result that those who sincerely accept and adopt its teaching—those, that is, who act on the assumption that Christianity is true—do, as a matter of fact, solve the practical problem of human existence, with a degree of success elsewhere and otherwise, unattained and unattainable by men.

Each of these lines of evidence has infinite ramifications, and together they form—not a chain of reasoning, which would be no stronger than its weakest link—but an immense cumulative argument, whose independent members converge, from every department of human experience, upon a central point. Consequently, when we come to criticize any detail of this evidence, we do so with all the rest of the great argument present as a presupposition in our mind. When, for instance, we are examining the facts recorded in the Gospels, we have in mind all the philosophical considerations which point, through natural religion, to their probability, as well as all their practical

results in the world to-day. When again we are discussing the philosophical probability of a revelation, we do so with the existence of the Gospel history and the Christian society in view. Or again, when we are criticizing the Christian society as it exists in the world to-day, we regard it in the light of its historic origin as recorded in the Gospels, and of all the philosophical and religious presuppositions which conspire to make that record antecedently probable. And the real strength of the argument consists in its harmonious coherence as a whole<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, while Christianity comes into no direct contact, and much less therefore into any possibility of conflict, with the discoveries of science, since they move in two different spheres, it yet necessarily welcomes all such discoveries as part of God's natural revelation of Himself to man; and indeed as ultimately resting on the same assumption as Christian theology itself. For the necessary presupposition of all science is the assumption that the world is rationally ordered, and can therefore be intelligibly known. And the necessary presupposition of all theology is the same; with the corollary that human nature is an integral part of this rational order, and therefore ultimately destined for the satisfaction which it craves, and which will alone make its creation intelligible. Otherwise the

<sup>1</sup> See Note 12.

world would be rational up to a certain point, and then lapse into irrationality, which is an absurd supposition. Thus Christianity really possesses in science an indirect but important ally—a fact which is only obscured in the popular mind, because scientific discoveries are often illegitimately pressed into the service of anti-Christian philosophy.

For with philosophy the case is different: with that Christianity is in direct and immediate contact, since, as we have said, it involves a philosophy of its own; or, more strictly speaking, holds certain cardinal truths which have a philosophic as well as a practical significance. Whence in matters of philosophy it claims to have a voice, and to condemn or sanction all other systems, in proportion to the degree of their repugnance or approximation to itself.

Hence it is in the region of philosophy, and not of science, that all attacks on Christianity move and must be met. And philosophy is not a matter of abstract but of concrete thinking. It involves a judgement not only of the intellectual, but of the emotional, æsthetic, and moral aspects of the world. And such judgement is not only the work of our whole personality, as distinct from our mere reason, but is necessarily qualified by the character of that personality. And this character again depends upon our spiritual history, upon all that we have been and done, upon the employment of our time



and opportunities, upon the use we have made of our free-will in the past. Whence we are personally responsible for the general tenor, at any rate, of that philosophy of life, which though it only becomes explicit in a minority, all men implicitly possess.

It is not therefore from the hands of every man that Christianity can accept criticism. For the most important elements in its evidence are moral and spiritual facts; and these can only be read aright by men of moral and spiritual insight—insight born of discipline and effort. It is only to such critics that Christianity can appeal, with its claim to be, when regarded as a whole, more reasonable than any other view of the world; and this on the ground that, while embracing all the facts of experience as readily as any rival system, and finding ample room for them within its scope, it surpasses them all in its explanation and treatment of the facts of human life. For it is the constant desire of man to find himself at home in the universe; passively to feel at home in it, by coming to understand it, and so making it familiar instead of alien and strange; and actively to make his home in it, by so controlling its laws and forces that, instead of hindering his actions, they become the instruments of his will. But a person cannot be at home among merely impersonal surroundings; inanimate furniture, without living inmates, would

not constitute a home. It is of the very essence of personality to depend upon the society of other persons, and in the last resort upon their love. The desire of man's heart is deeper-seated than that of his intellect or his will. And it is not enough therefore for him to understand the universe, or to make its laws his own. If he is ever really to be at home in it, he must find there a personality akin to himself—Another on whom he may adequately exercise his limitless capacity for loving, and on whom he may depend in the ultimate repose of being adequately loved. The mere analysis of our personality discovers this necessity within us. And Christianity alone discloses such a view of God as meets our need. But it does not disclose it as a theory, which the wish that is father to the thought might have invented. It discloses it as a fact, which we may each of us verify for ourselves. For Christianity appeals to us as a society existing in the world to-day, whose object is not merely to proclaim but to exhibit God's love for man, by the purport of its ordinances and institutions, and by the lives that its members lead. It is a society, after all, composed of sinful men, whose manifold imperfections and inconsistencies seriously obscure its witness. But, if we would rightly estimate that witness, we must look behind these things, for the characters, comparatively rare but actually numerous, who truly represent the

Christian spirit—the missionaries, the martyrs, the holy and humble men of heart, who are devoting their lives, the whole world over, to the spiritual service of their fellow men. And when we do this, with sympathetic insight, we see that there is abroad in the world to-day a love which its possessors assert to be of superhuman origin, and whose characteristics amply justify the claim.

This love then is a fact of experience, and we know from history that it has been so, generation after generation, for now nigh upon two thousand years. And it is in the light of this immense experience, which cannot be gainsaid, that we read the record of its origin, in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; who founded this society, and convinced His disciples of His own authority to found it; expressly to bear living witness, thenceforward through the ages, of the fact that God is Love, and out of love has assumed human nature, that man may in union with Him find the universe his Father's house and home.

## NOTES

### I. THE MENTAL INITIATIVE IN KNOWLEDGE

**I**T is the critical analysis of this principle, as against Hume, that we owe to Kant. But the recognition of the principle itself is as old as Greek philosophy. It is hinted at by Plato in his well-known doctrine of 'reminiscence,' and was very clearly stated by Plotinus. In the following passage of our great English Platonist, Cudworth, it is applied in criticism of Hobbes :—

'Knowledge is not a passion from anything without the mind, but an active exertion of the inward strength, vigour and power of the mind, displaying itself from within ; and the intelligible forms by which things are understood or known, are not stamps or impressions passively printed upon the soul from without, but ideas vitally protended or actively exerted from within itself.

'A thing which is merely passive from without, and doth only receive foreign and adventitious forms, cannot possibly know, understand, or judge of that which it receives, but must needs be a stranger to it, having nothing within itself to know it by. The mind cannot know anything, but by

something of its own, that is native, domestic and familiar to it. When in a great throng or crowd of people, a man looking round about meets with innumerable strange faces that he never saw before in all his life, and at last chances to espy the face of one old friend or acquaintance which he had not seen or thought of many years before ; he would be said in this case to have known that one, and only that one face in all that company, because he had no inward, previous or anticipated form of any other face, that he looked upon, in his mind ; but as soon as ever he beheld that one face, immediately there revived and started forth a former anticipated form or idea of it treasured up in his mind, that, as it were taking acquaintance with that newly received form, made him know it or remember it. So when foreign, strange and adventitious forms are exhibited to the mind by sense, the soul cannot otherwise know or understand them, but by something domestic of its own, some active anticipation or prolepsis within itself, that occasionally reviving and meeting with it, makes it know it, or take acquaintance with it. And this is the only true and allowable sense of that old assertion, that knowledge is reminiscence, not that it is the remembrance of something which the soul had sometime before actually known in a pre-existent state ; but because it is the mind's comprehending of things by some inward anticipations of its own, something native and domestic to it, or something actively exerted from within itself.' (*Eternal and Immutable Morality*, iv. 1.)

## II. THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE OF THE MORAL LAW

THE following passage on the authority of the moral law is from Richard Price, who, on this and other points, writing a few years earlier, remarkably anticipates Kant :—

‘ It is not indeed plainer, that figure implies something figured, solidity resistance, or an effect a cause, than it is that *rightness* implies *oughtness* (if I may be allowed this word) or *obligatoriness* . . . Rectitude then, or virtue is a Law. And it is the *first* and *supreme* law, to which all other laws owe their force, on which they depend, and in virtue of which alone they oblige It is an *universal Law*. The whole creation is ruled by it: under it men and all rational beings subsist. It is the source and guide of all the actions of the Deity himself, and on it his throne and government are founded. It is an *unalterable and indispensable Law*. The repeal, suspension or even *relaxation* of it, once for a moment, in any part of the universe, cannot be conceived without a contradiction. Other laws have had a date; a time when they were enacted, and became of force. They are confined to particular places, rest on precarious foundations, may lose their vigour, grow obsolete with time, and become useless and neglected. Nothing like this can be true of this law. It has no date. It never was made or enacted. It is prior to all things. It

is self-valid and self-originated ; and must for ever retain its usefulness and vigour, without the possibility of diminution or abatement. It is coeval with eternity ; as unalterable as necessary, everlasting truth ; as independent as the existence of God ; and as sacred and awful as his nature and perfections. The *authority* it possesses is native and essential to it, underived and absolute. It is superior to all other authority, and the basis and parent of all other authority. It is indeed self-evident that, properly speaking, there is no other authority ; nothing else that can claim our obedience, or that *ought* to guide and rule heaven and earth. It is, in short, the *one* authority in nature, the same in all times and in all places ; or, in one word, the *Divine* authority.' (*Review of the principal questions in Morals*, pp. 170, 178.)

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### III. THE ANTECEDENT PROBABILITY OF A REVELATION

THIS is strongly emphasized by that rigid reasoner Samuel Clarke—whom Voltaire called *moulin à raisonnement*—as follows:—

'Since therefore there was plainly and confessedly wanting a *Divine Revelation* to relieve the Necessities of Men in their Natural State ; And since no Man can presume to say, that 'tis inconsistent with any of the Attributes of God, or

unbecoming the Wisdom of the Creator of all Things, to supply that want ; . . . Nay, since, on the contrary, it seems *more suitable* to our natural Notions of the Goodness and Mercy of God, to suppose that He should do all this than not, it follows undeniably, that it was most reasonable, and agreeable to the Dictates of Nature, to *expect* or *hope for* such a Divine Revelation.' . . . 'From what has been said upon this Head, it appears plainly, that 'tis agreeable to the natural Hopes and Expectations of Men, that is, of Right Reason duly improved, to suppose God making some particular Revelation of His Will to Mankind, which may supply the undeniable Defects of the Light of Nature. And, at the same Time, 'tis evident that such a Thing is by no Means unworthy of the Divine Wisdom, or inconsistent with any of the Attributes of God ; but rather, on the contrary, most suitable to them. Consequently, considering the manifold Wants and Necessities of Men, and the abundant Goodness and Mercy of God, there is great Ground, from Right Reason and the Light of Nature, to believe that God would not always leave Men wholly destitute of so needful an Assistance, but would at some Time or other actually afford it them.' (*A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, pp. 156, 164.)

Barrow, also, who was a distinguished mathematician and acute reasoner, makes great use of this argument in his sermons on the Apostles' Creed, concluding :—



‘Reason tells us that God would have man act in the best manner, according to the design of his nature; that he would have the affairs of men proceed in good order; that he even desires earnestly the good of men, and delights in their happiness: and if so, it is reasonable to suppose that being most wise he should dispose fit means for accomplishing those ends; for securing himself, as it were, from disappointment; that therefore he should impart to men a competent knowledge of himself, should declare his good-will and pleasure to them, should reveal both the best way of their serving him, and the best means of their attaining happiness to themselves. So divine wisdom grounds an argument for our supposition.’ . . . ‘This consideration, if it do not prove peremptorily that God cannot but sometime make such a revelation, nor that he yet hath actually done it . . . yet it removes all obstruction to our belief, and disposes us with more readiness to admit the reasons which follow: for it being not improbable, yea, according to the reason of the thing, very probable that he should do it, we have cause with attention and expectation of success on this hand to regard the arguments that pretend to prove he hath done it.’ (Sermon xiii.)

The following passage from Paley is probably better known:—

. . . ‘Suppose, then, the world we live in to have had a Creator; suppose it to appear, from the

predominant aim and tendency of the provisions and contrivances observable in the universe, that the Deity, when he formed it, consulted for the happiness of his sensitive creation; suppose the disposition which dictated this counsel to continue; suppose a part of the creation to have received faculties from their Maker, by which they are capable of rendering a moral obedience to his will, and of voluntarily pursuing any end for which he has designed them; suppose the Creator to intend for these, his rational and accountable agents, a second state of existence, in which their situation will be regulated by their behaviour in the first state, by which supposition (and by no other) the objection to the divine government in not putting a difference between the good and the bad, and the inconsistency of this confusion with the care and benevolence discoverable in the works of the Deity, is done away; suppose it to be of the utmost importance to the subjects of this dispensation to know what is intended for them; that is, suppose the knowledge of it to be highly conducive to the happiness of the species, a purpose which so many provisions of nature are calculated to promote: Suppose, nevertheless, almost the whole race, either by the imperfection of their faculties, the misfortune of their situation, or by the loss of some prior revelation, to want this knowledge, and not to be likely, without the aid of a new revelation, to attain it: Under these circumstances, is it improbable that a revelation should be made? is it incredible that

God should interpose for such a purpose? Suppose him to design for mankind a future state; is it unlikely that he should acquaint him with it?' (*Evidences of Christianity*, ad init.)

#### IV. CICERO ON MORAL EVIL

CLARKE quotes the following striking passages from Cicero (op. cit. pp. 124-5, where he gives the original), with the comment that 'A livelier description of the present corrupt estate of human nature is not easily to be met with':—

'If we had come into the World,' saith he, 'in such circumstances, as that we could clearly and distinctly have discerned Nature herself, and have been able, in the Course of our Lives, to follow her true and uncorrupted Directions: This alone might have been sufficient, and there would have been little Need of Teaching and Instruction. But now Nature has given us only some small Sparks of right Reason, which we so quickly extinguish with corrupt Opinions and evil Practices, that the true Light of Nature no where appears. As soon as we are brought into the World, immediately we dwell in the midst of all Wickedness, and are surrounded with a number of most perverse and foolish Opinions; so that we seem to suck in error even with our Nurses milk. Afterwards, when we return to our Parents, and are committed to Tutors; then

we are further stocked with such Variety of Errors, that Truth becomes perfectly overwhelmed with Falsehood; and the most natural Sentiments of our Minds are intirely stifled with confirmed Follies. But when, after all this, we enter upon Business in the World, and make the Multitude, conspiring every-where in Wickedness, our great Guide and Example; then our very Nature itself is wholly transformed, as it were, into corrupt Opinions.'

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## V. THE INFLUENCE OF PRESUPPOSITIONS ON OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS MIRACLES

PALEY, though he does not develop this point with sufficient emphasis, alludes to it as follows, when speaking of Hume:—

'Herein I remark a want of argumentative justice, that, in describing the improbability of miracles, he suppresses all those circumstances of extenuation, which result from our knowledge of the existence, power, and disposition of the Deity; his concern in the creation, the end answered by the miracle, the importance of that end, and its subserviency to the plan pursued in the work of nature. As Mr. Hume has represented the question, miracles are alike incredible to him who is previously assured of the constant agency of a Divine Being, and to him who believes that no such Being exists in the universe.

They are equally incredible, whether related to have been wrought upon occasions the most deserving, and for purposes the most beneficial, or for no assignable end whatever, or for an end confessedly trifling or pernicious. This surely cannot be a correct statement.' (*Evidences*, ad init.)

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## VI. MAN'S DIGNITY AS A SPIRITUAL BEING

THE following passage from Boyle is of interest, from the fact that, as stated in the text, he was a leader of the physical science of his day:—

... 'When I consider, that matter, how vastly extended, and how curiously shaped soever, is but a brute thing, that is only capable of local motion, and its effects and consequents on other bodies, or the brain of man, without being capable of any true, or at least any intellectual perception, or true love or hatred; and when I consider the rational soul as an immaterial and immortal being, that bears the image of its divine maker, being endowed with a capacious intellect, and a will, that no creature can force; I am by these considerations disposed to think the soul of man a nobler and more valuable being, than the whole corporeal world; which though I readily acknowledge it to be admirably contrived, and worthy of the almighty and omniscient author, yet it consists but of an

aggregate of portions of brute matter, variously shaped and connected by local motion . . . but without any knowledge either of their own nature, or of that of their author, or of that of their fellow-creatures. And as the rational soul is somewhat more noble and wonderful, than a thing merely corporeal, how vast soever it can be, and is of a more excellent nature, than the curioucest piece of mechanism in the world, the human body; so to enquire what shall become of it, and what fates it is like to undergo hereafter, does better deserve a man's curiosity, than to know what shall befall the corporal universe.' . . . (*Works*, iv. pp. 19, 20.)

The argument from man's insignificance is answered by Clarke, as follows:—

'As to this Difficulty, viz. how it can be consistent with Reason to suppose God condescending to do so very great Things for such mean and weak Creatures as Men are, who in all Appearance, seem to be but a very small, low, and inconsiderable Part of the Creation; forasmuch as the whole Earth itself is but a little Spot that bears no proportion at all to the Universe; and in all Probability of Reason, the large and numberless Orbs of Heaven cannot but be supposed to be filled with Beings more capable, than we, to show forth the Praise and Glory of their Almighty Creator, and more worthy to be the Objects of his Care and Love: To this Part of the Difficulty. I say, the Answer is very easy, That the Mercy and Love of the in-

initely good God, is extended equally over all his Works: That, let the Universe be supposed as large, and the rational Creatures, with which it is furnished, as many and excellent, as any one can imagine, yet mankind is plainly the Chief, indeed the only Inhabitant, for whose Sake 'tis evident this our Globe of Earth is, as far as we have any Means of judging, as considerable and worthy of the Divine Care, as most other Parts of the System; and this our System as considerable, as any other single System in the Universe; and finally, that, in like manner as the same Divine Providence, which presides over the whole Creation, does particularly govern and direct every Thing in this our lower World, as well as in every other particular Part of the Universe; so there is no real Difficulty to right Reason, in conceiving that the same Divine Logos, the Word or Messenger of the Father, who in various Dispensations, according to the particular Needs and Exigences of Mankind, has made various Manifestations of God, and Discoveries of the Divine Will, to us here upon Earth, may also, for aught we know, have to other Beings, in other Parts of the Universe, according to their several Capacities or Wants, made different Manifestations of God and Discoveries of his Will, in Ways of which we can know nothing, and, in which we have no Concern: There being nothing in this at all contrary to the Nature of God, or the Condition of Things.' (*Evidence of Nat. and Rev. Religion*, p. 199.)

## VII. UNION OF HUMAN WITH DIVINE WILL

I VENTURE to quote the following striking passage on this subject as being probably unfamiliar to many readers :—

‘The essence of Christianity, again, is, that the human being becomes without a will, and yet has the strongest will. It is self in the utmost degree triumphant, by means of the utter annihilation of self. For the Christian seeks absolute conformity of his will to the will of God, whatever that may be, and however promulgated. He desires, and is capable of, no other happiness. It would be misery to him to imagine himself divided from that will. The conforming to that will is, then, in the utmost degree, in most utter spontaneity, perfect liberty, and yet absolute law. But in this state, his own will, which, towards God, is nothing but the resignation of all will, is towards all human beings utter and irresistible. He can speak and act ; he can do whatever is to be done ; he can rule the spirits of men ; he can go conquering nations in the power of the Word, and the sword of the Spirit. Therefore, so he is at once self-triumphant and self-annihilated. He is self-annihilated, for he has given himself up ; he feels himself not—is nothing—mere conformity—passiveness—manifestations of an agency. He feels only the presence, the spirit, the power in which he lives. He lives in God. At



the same time it is self-triumphant. For what is self, but the innermost and very nature of the being, the *intima et ipsissima essentia*? All that is subsequent and accidental is not self; but this Christian Love, as it advances, throws off, expels more and more, everything that is subsequent and accidental, bringing out into activity, consciousness, and power, that nature which was given with being to the soul. Moreover, this state of surrendered, happy Love, searches that nature with pleasures nothing short of ecstasy. So that the ultimate extinction of self becomes its unspeakable happiness; and self, annihilated, exalted in glory, and bathed in bliss, is self-triumphant, and Death is Immortality.' (Professor Wilson, *Works*, vol. iii. xxx. p. 9.)

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## VIII. ETHICAL TELEOLOGY

THIS argument is forcibly put by Price:—

'Tis self-evident that virtue *ought* to be happier than vice; and we may be very confident that what *ought to be*, the universal governing mind will take care *shall be*. . . . If nothing is to be expected beyond this world, no suitable provision is made for many different cases amongst men; no remarkable manifestation is seen of the divine holiness; and the most noble and excellent of all objects, that on which the welfare of the creation depends, and which raises beings to the nearest resemblances

of the Deity, seems to be left without any adequate support. Is this possible under the *Divine* government? Can it be conceived that the wisdom and equity of Providence should fail only in the instance of virtue? that here, where we should expect the exactest order, there should be the least? But acknowledge the reference of this scene to a future more important scene, and all is clear; every difficulty is removed, and every irregularity vanishes. A plain account offers itself of all the strange phaenomena in human life. 'Tis of little consequence how much at any time virtue suffers and vice triumphs *here*, if *hereafter* there is to be a just distinction between them, and every inequality is to be set right.' (*Review*, pp. 438, 450.)

And again by Leighton:—

'The principal beauty of the creation consists in this, that all things in it are disposed in the most excellent order, and every particular intended for some noble and suitable end; and if this could not be said of man, who is the glory of the visible world, what a great deformity must it be, how great a gap in nature! And this gap must be greater in that, as we have already observed, man is naturally endued with strong and vigorous desires towards such an end. . . . This would not only have been a frightful gap in nature, but, if I am allowed so to speak, at this rate the whole human race must have been created in misery, and exposed to unavoidable torments, from which they could never

have been relieved, had they been formed not only capable of a good quite unattainable and altogether without their reach, but also with strong and restless desires towards that impossible good. Now, as this is by no means to be admitted, there must necessarily be some full, permanent, and satisfying good, that may be attained by man, and in the possession of which he must be truly happy.' (*Works*, p. 558.)

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## IX. GOD THE ONLY ADEQUATE OBJECT OF HUMAN LOVE

BUTLER, whose method in morals is, he says, 'to inquire what the particular nature of man is, its several parts, their economy or constitution; from whence it proceeds to determine what course of life it is which is correspondent to this whole nature,' a method which, he adds, 'is in a peculiar manner adapted to satisfy a fair mind,' sees clearly that the mere analysis of human personality necessarily points to God as its only adequate object.

Cf. Sermon ii on the Love of God:—

'Let us suppose a man entirely disengaged from business and pleasure, sitting down alone and at leisure, to reflect upon himself and his condition of being. He would immediately feel that he was by no means complete of himself, but totally insufficient for his own happiness. One may venture to affirm

that every man hath felt this, whether he hath again reflected upon it or not. It is feeling this deficiency, that they are unsatisfied with themselves, which makes men look out for assistance from abroad ; and which has given rise to various kinds of amusements, altogether need'less any otherwise than as they serve to fill up the blank spaces of time, and so hinder their feeling this deficiency, and being uneasy with themselves. Now, if these externals we take up with were really an adequate supply to this deficiency of human nature, if by their means our capacities and desires were all satisfied and filled up ; then it might be truly said that we had found out the proper happiness of man ; and so might sit down satisfied, and be at rest in the enjoyment of it. But if it appears that the amusements, which men usually pass their time in, are so far from coming up to or answering our notions and desires of happiness or good, that they are really no more than what they are commonly called, somewhat to pass away the time ; i.e. somewhat which serves to turn us aside from, and prevent our attending to, this our internal poverty and want ; if they serve only or chiefly to suspend, instead of satisfying our conceptions and desires of happiness ; if the want remains, and we have found out little more than barely the means of making it less sensible ; then are we still to seek for somewhat to be an adequate supply to it. It is plain that there is a capacity in the nature of man which neither riches, nor honours, nor sensual gratifica-

tions, nor anything in this world can perfectly fill up or satisfy ; there is a deeper and more essential want than any of these things can be the supply of. Yet surely there is a possibility of somewhat which may fill up all our capacities of happiness ; somewhat which may be to us that satisfactory good we are inquiring after. But it cannot be anything which is valuable only as it tends to some further end. Those therefore who have got this world so much into their hearts as not to be able to consider happiness as consisting in anything but property and possessions, which are only valuable as the means to somewhat else, cannot have the least glimpse of the subject before us, which is the end, not the means ; the thing itself, not somewhat in order to it. But if you can lay aside that general, confused, undeterminate notion of happiness as consisting in such possessions, and fix in your thoughts that it really can exist in nothing but in a faculty's having its proper object, you will clearly see that in the coolest way of consideration, without either the heat of fanciful enthusiasm or the warmth of real devotion, nothing is more certain than that an infinite Being may himself be, if He pleases, the supply to all the capacities of our nature. All the common enjoyments of life are from the faculties He hath endued us with, and the objects He hath made suitable to them. He may Himself be to us infinitely more than all these ; He may be to us all that we want. As our understanding can contemplate itself, and our affections be exercised upon

themselves by reflection, so may each be employed in the same manner upon any other mind : and since the supreme Mind, the Author and Cause of all things, is the highest possible object to Himself, He may be an adequate supply to all the faculties of our souls ; a subject to our understanding, and an object to our affections.' (Butler, *Sermon xiv.*)

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## X. THE INFLUENCE OF THE WILL UPON FAITH

'WHOEVER indeed will consider the nature of man, or will consult obvious experience, shall find that in all practical matters our will or appetite hath a mighty influence on our judgement of things ; causing men with great attention to regard that which they affect, and carefully to mark all reasons making for it ; but averting from that which they dislike, and making them to overlook the arguments which persuade it ; whence men generally do suit their opinions to their inclinations ; warping to that side where their interest doth lie, or to which their complexion, their humor, their passions, their pleasure, their ease doth sway them ; so that almost any notion will seem true, which is profitable, which is safe, which is pleasant, or anywise grateful to them ; that notion false, which in any such respect doth cross them : very few can abstract their minds from such considerations, or embrace

pure truth, divested of them ; and those few who do so, must therein most employ their will, by strong efforts of voluntary resolution and patience disengaging their minds from those clogs and biasses. This is particularly notorious in men's adherence to parties, divided in opinion, which is so regulated by that sort of causes, that if you do mark what any man's temper is, and where his interest lieth, you may easily prognosticate on what side he will be, and with what degree of seriousness of vigor, of zeal he will cleave thereto ; a timorous man you may be almost sure will be on the safer side ; a covetous man will bend to that party where gain is to be had ; an ambitious man will close with the opinion passing in court ; a careless man will comply with the fashion ; affection arising from education or prejudice will hold others stiff ; few do follow the results of impartial contemplation. All faith, therefore, even in common things, may be deemed voluntary, no less than intellectual ; and Christian faith is especially such, as requiring thereto more application of soul, managed by choice, than any other ; whence the ancients, in their description of it, do usually include this condition, supposing it not to be a bare assent of the understanding, but a free consent of the will : " Faith," saith Clemens Alexandrinus, " is a spontaneous acceptance, and compliance with divine religion." (Barrow, *Serm. on Apost. Creed*, ii. p. 58.)

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## XI. IMPERFECTION OF OUR PRESENT COMPREHENSION OF THE UNIVERSE

THIS is well put in the following passage by Clarke :—

‘It may here at first Sight seem to be a very strange Thing, that through the whole System of Nature in the material, in the inanimate, in the irrational Part of the Creation, every single Thing should have in itself so many and so obvious, so evident and undeniable Marks of the infinitely accurate Skill and Wisdom of their Almighty Creator, that from the brightest Star in the Firmament of Heaven, to the meanest Pebble upon the Face of the Earth, there is no one Piece of Matter, which does not afford such Instances of admirable Artifice and exact Proportion and Contrivance, as exceeds all the Wit of Man (I do not say to imitate, but even) ever to be able fully to search out and comprehend : And yet, that in the Management of the rational and moral World, for the Sake of which all the rest was created, and is preserved only to be subservient to it, there should not, in many Ages, be plain Evidences enough, either of the Wisdom, or of the Justice and Goodness of God, or of so much as the Interposition of his divine Providence at all, to convince Mankind clearly and generally of the World’s being under his immediate Care, Inspection, and Government. This, I say, may indeed at first Sight seem very



wonderful: But if we consider the Matter more closely and attentively, it will appear not to be so strange and astonishing as we are apt to imagine. For, as in a great Machine, contrived by the Skill of a consummate Artificer, fitted up and adjusted with all conceivable Accuracy for some very difficult and deep-projected Design, and polished and fine-wrought in every part of it with admirable Niceness and Dexterity; any Man, who saw and examined one or two Wheels thereof, could not fail to observe, in those single Parts of it, the admirable Art and exact Skill of the Work-man; and yet the Excellency of the End or Use for which the Whole was contrived he would not at all be able, even though he was himself also a skilled Artificer, to discover and comprehend, without seeing the Whole fitted up and put together: So though in every Part of the natural World, considered even single and unconnected, the Wisdom of the great Creator sufficiently appears; yet his Wisdom, and Justice and Goodness, in the Disposition and Government of the moral World, which necessarily depends on the Connexion and Issue of the whole Scheme, cannot perhaps be distinctly and fully comprehended by any Finite and Created Beings, much less by frail and weak and short-lived Mortals, before the Period and Accomplishment of certain great Revolutions. But 'tis exceedingly reasonable to believe, that as the Great Discoveries, which, by the Diligence and Sagacity of later Ages, have been made in Astronomy and Natural Philosophy, have opened

surprising Scenes of the Power and Wisdom of the Creator, beyond what Men could possibly have conceived or imagined in Former Times: So, at the Unfolding of the whole Scheme of Providence in the Conclusion of this present State, Men will be surpris'd with the amazing Manifestations of Justice and Goodness, which will then appear to have run through the whole Series of God's Government of the Moral World. (Clarke, *Evidence of Nat. and Rev. Religion*, iv. 6.)

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## XII. CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE ONE WHOLE

‘THE evidence of Christianity will be a long series of things, reaching as it seems, from the beginning of the world to the present time, of great variety and compass, taking in both the direct, and also the collateral, proofs; and making up, all of them together, one argument: the conviction arising from which kind of proof may be compared to what they call the effect in architecture or other works of art; a result from a great number of things so and so disposed, and taken into one view.’ (Butler, *Analogy*, ii. 7.)

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